



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 3 June 2026**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Bev McArthur (from 18 November 2025)

David Davis (from 27 December 2024)

Georgie Crozier (to 27 December 2024)

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew <sup>1</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	Lib	Ratnam, Samantha <sup>5</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem <sup>6</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Ind
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina <sup>3</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Limbrick, David <sup>4</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard <sup>7</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> IndLib from 28 March 2023 until 27 December 2024

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 14 November 2024

<sup>4</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 8 November 2024

<sup>6</sup> DLP until 25 March 2024

<sup>7</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;  
Greens – Australian Greens; Ind – independent; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;  
LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;  
Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



# CONTENTS

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PAPERS	
Papers .....	1819
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices .....	1819
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Kensington Primary School .....	1819
Waste and recycling management .....	1819
Vehicle registration rebate .....	1820
National Volunteer Week .....	1820
Grano .....	1820
Housing .....	1820
Russia–Ukraine war .....	1821
Russia–Ukraine war .....	1821
Mirabel Foundation .....	1821
Firearms regulation .....	1821
Indonesian community .....	1822
Sima Garfield .....	1822
PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Cranbourne rail line .....	1822
Construction industry .....	1827
MOTIONS	
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission .....	1831
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Game hunting .....	1845
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission .....	1845
Ministers statements: Horseshoe Bend community garden .....	1846
Illicit tobacco .....	1847
Construction industry .....	1848
Ministers statements: Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund .....	1849
Data centres .....	1850
Camping regulation .....	1851
Ministers statements: Centre of Excellence in Paramedicine .....	1852
Health system .....	1852
Health system .....	1853
Ministers statements: naloxone dispensing machines .....	1855
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	1855
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	1856
Northern Victoria Region .....	1856
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	1856
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	1856
Northern Victoria Region .....	1857
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	1857
Northern Victoria Region .....	1857
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	1857
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	1858
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	1858
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	1858
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	1858
Western Victoria Region .....	1858
Western Metropolitan Region .....	1859
MOTIONS	
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission .....	1859
Planning policy .....	1862
Public transport .....	1880
STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS	
Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....	1898
Inquiry into Electricity Supply for Electric Vehicles .....	1898
Victorian Auditor-General’s Office .....	1898
Out-of-Home Care Services .....	1898
Legal and Social Issues Committee .....	1899
Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne’s Public Housing Towers .....	1899

# CONTENTS

---

Victorian Law Reform Commission .....	1900
Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences .....	1900
Victorian Auditor-General's Office.....	1901
Out-of-Home Care Services .....	1901
Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.....	1902
Interim report .....	1902
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	1902
Budget papers 2026–27 .....	1902
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	1903
Budget papers 2026–27 .....	1903
PETITIONS	
Fire services.....	1904
ADJOURNMENT	
Glasses for Kids program .....	1911
Corrections system .....	1911
Medicinal cannabis.....	1912
Energy policy .....	1912
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region transport infrastructure .....	1912
Beaconsfield Upper roads.....	1913
Victorian energy upgrades program .....	1914
Crown land management.....	1914
Beulah Primary School .....	1914
Commercial passenger vehicle industry.....	1915
Tarneit Indoor Sports Facility .....	1915
Local government.....	1915
Donnybrook Road upgrade .....	1916
Koala management.....	1917
Gender identity .....	1917
Rural and regional health services .....	1918
Responses .....	1918

**Wednesday 3 June 2026**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an Acknowledgement of Country.**

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Out-of-Home Care Services, June 2026 (*Ordered to be published*).

Owners Corporations Act 2006 – Final Report on the Statutory Review of the Owners Corporations Act 2006, under section 210 of the Act.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Conveyancers Act 2006 – Nos. 49 and 50.

Estate Agents Act 1980 – Nos. 51 and 52.

Owners Corporations Act 2026 – Nos. 53 and 54.

Relationships Act 2008 – No. 48.

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – No. 55.

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.***Members statements***Kensington Primary School**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): Let me tell you that Kensington Primary School is a well-loved local school in the Northern Metropolitan Region, and this week I visited the school alongside the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education and our hardworking local councillor Davydd Griffiths. Walking through the grounds, it was obvious how much the staff, parents and students care about their school. We took the time to not only see what our government has invested to support Kensington Primary but also to listen directly to the school community about what they need, because we all want the best for our kids. When it comes to supporting education in the north, the contrast could not be clearer: when it comes to the Liberals, it is cuts to education; when it comes to the Greens, it is empty rhetoric. Neither of them are anywhere to be found when it comes to the hard work of delivery in our community. Only Labor shows up to listen and deliver for the schools in the north. We do not just talk about education, we invest in it. The Allan Labor government knows that every child deserves a great education and the facilities needed to help them grow. We will keep working with the Kensington Primary School community to ensure our local students have the best facilities and resources they need and absolutely deserve.

**Waste and recycling management**

**David ETTERSANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:50): On Sunday 24 May I was fortunate enough to attend a rally organised by the Sunbury ‘no incinerator’ campaign. It was a big, boisterous gathering with a lot of media in attendance. Sunbury is an amazing township, politically and culturally diverse but with a strong desire to protect its community and fight inappropriate development, such as the proposed Sunbury waste incinerator. And this fighting spirit was well and truly on display at the rally, as speakers from a broad political spectrum, including the local Labor member and the aspiring Liberal member, put aside their differences to condemn the incinerator proposal. Sunbury is already the unwelcome host to 1.5 million tonnes of West Gate Tunnel spoil and has no intention of tolerating an incinerator burning 750,000 tonnes of waste a year, spewing a range of toxic chemicals over homes,

schools, shops and kinders. With the incinerator proponent HiQ proposing to lodge their application with the EPA in the next few weeks, this government needs to wake up and smell the fumes. Stop this outrageous proposal or expect to lose the seat of Sunbury in November.

### **Vehicle registration rebate**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:52): From this week Victorians can claim a 20 per cent rebate on their car registration. We know that the war in the Middle East has elevated the cost of transport, meaning filling up the car is now more expensive than ever. And in recognition of this, this year Labor has delivered two months of free public transport and fares have been cut in half for the rest of the year. But for many Victorians, running a car is not optional and not all trips can be easily substituted for public transport, and that is why we are cutting the cost of rego. We are offering a cash rebate on your registration. From this Monday, Victorians have been able to claim a 20 per cent rebate on the cost of their registration this financial year, and as of today, more than a million Victorians have processed a claim for 20 per cent off their rego. It applies to cars, utes, vans and motorcycles, and because some families need more than one car, you can claim up to two vehicles per person. You can apply now on the Service Victoria website or on the Service Victoria app, and you have got until 31 July to do so. We are putting money back in families' pockets – \$186 for one car, \$372 for two – paired with mandatory real-time reporting on the Servo Saver app. Labor is helping Victorians on the move to get to the places they need to go at a lower cost.

### **National Volunteer Week**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (09:53): Volunteers are the unsung heroes of our community, often working away quietly without seeking recognition, attention or accolades. It was my pleasure to attend the Ballarat Foundation's morning tea as part of volunteers week recently to show our appreciation to all the volunteers who give up so much time and effort to help others, from our service clubs and L2P program drivers right through to those who work in food banks to support those less fortunate. Thank you to our volunteers, especially those in the Ballarat region, who make a huge difference every day. Your work is valued and appreciated, and it makes a real difference.

### **Grano**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (09:54): I was also pleased to attend the opening of Grano recently, which is an awesome new Italian restaurant in Ballarat. Despite the challenging conditions for small business thanks to the Victorian government – which you know all about – I want to acknowledge Garry and the team for offering a great dining experience to the Ballarat community. It takes hard work, sacrifice and dedication to own a small business, and a lot of grit as well. The food was excellent, the service was amazing, and if you have not tried it, I really encourage you to do so. Congratulations, Garry, and I look forward to Grano being in business, hopefully, for many years ahead.

### **Housing**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): Eid Mubarak to our Muslim community. I had the pleasure of celebrating Eid-ul-Adha with Awatif and the wonderful women and children at the Flemington public housing towers. My office hosted a community barbecue to celebrate this important cultural event, and one thing was obvious from this afternoon: there was a strong sense of community and belonging that makes these towers such a special place to call home. It was a reminder that these towers are far more than buildings; they are a close-knit community where people look out for one another. This is the same community that has been on the receiving end of this Allan Labor government's reckless decision to demolish these public housing towers. They promised to put residents at the centre of decision-making, yet all we have seen is them being treated as an afterthought. We heard loud and clear during the public housing inquiry the lack of engagement with residents and their treatment as less than. This Allan Labor government needs to stop giving public land and taxpayer-funded subsidies to wealthy investors and private developers. Labor is forcing people out of their homes and tearing communities like that of Awatif and these women and children at this barbecue

apart. Stop the demolition, keep this land for public housing and build more public housing. This community deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

#### **Russia–Ukraine war**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:56): As we assembled here in this place 24 hours ago, residents in a major European city were sheltering for their lives. Yesterday Ukraine suffered one of the worst onslaughts in the war, with barbaric attacks on civilians in their houses as they slept – attacks which were deliberately targeting residential areas once again. At least 23 people have been killed and well over 130 injured in cities including Kyiv and Dnipro. Right now, at this very minute, 11 Ukrainian oblasts are under attack or under air raid alert. These are the actions of a fascist, imperialistic terrorist state that is hell-bent on the destruction of the Ukrainian people and their culture. But they will fail, and they must fail, and we must all do everything in our power to see that they do. They will fail principally because the spirit of the Ukrainian people cannot be defeated. It is a spirit that is being expressed through culture in Ukraine and indeed right here in Australia, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend Ashley Awramenko and Andrew Mykhaylyk, amongst others, for launching the very successful inaugural Ukrainian Film Festival right here in Australia.

#### **Russia–Ukraine war**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:57): I would like to start by offering my sincere thoughts and condolences to the people of Ukraine and for all those who are sheltering here, in the south-east and throughout Victoria and Australia, who are considering and thinking about family and friends who have been left behind at this very dreadful time. Our thoughts are with you, and we hope that many of your family and friends are okay, but we do understand the devastation that is taking place.

#### **Mirabel Foundation**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): I also wish to speak about some organisations doing amazing work in the south-east. I recently visited the Mirabel Foundation, which supports children impacted by parents with drug habits. Eighty-one per cent of these children are now raised by grandparents or extended family. Since 1998 Mirabel has supported 5882 children, including more than 2000 currently in their care. Last year they delivered 28,000 hours of support and assisted 1230 families. Their carer groups, education programs, resiliency support camps and alumni mentoring help children and young people build confidence and stability. I commend the Mirabel Foundation and all those involved for its unwavering commitment to supporting vulnerable young people and their dedicated family carers. I would also like to acknowledge Little Dreamers and Street Peace, but I will leave that for another time.

#### **Firearms regulation**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:59): How many guns are too many? Well, according to Jacinta Allan, the limit does not exist. The government's rejection of the most important recommendation from the rapid review that it commissioned into Victoria's firearm laws to cap individual firearm ownership must be called out for what it is: placing the interests of duck shooters and the shooting lobby over the safety of all Victorians. Like many Victorians, I am outraged, but I am hardly surprised. It is exactly the sort of thing we warned would happen if they caved on issues like duck shooting. Since then we have seen the power of the gun lobby in this state continue to grow and grow, whether it be the minister making a policy announcement at a private shooting function or inviting them into Parliament to make content with government MPs. Every single time that they have been faced with decisions on the wellbeing of animals, the planet and now people, they have given in to the demands of firearm owners. Every single day it seems like Victoria is becoming more like America. It feels like it is only a matter of time until we hear someone from the government say, 'Guns don't kill people. People kill people.' It is not hard to see who is really calling the shots in Victoria.

### Indonesian community

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:00): Last Friday I had the pleasure of opening a fashion runway at Federation Square with the Consul General of Indonesia. It was absolutely incredible. It looked absolutely gorgeous as the designers, who had come from Indonesia and the Australian Indonesian community, showcased the incredible work and their incredible artisanship. There were hundreds and hundreds of people there, and it was really a celebration of the connection of the Victorian culture and the Indonesian culture. The next day I was delighted to open the Satay and Reog Festival at Fed Square, and again there were dancers from local Indonesian community groups, young kids that were celebrating the culture and telling the story of their heritage proudly. It was absolutely incredible. There were stallholders from people that had walked the runway the day before. Of course I shopped, as I do, and bought a beautiful silk cape from one of the designers. It was really a celebration of the best that Australia has to offer. Modern Australia has an Indigenous heritage, it has a British foundation and it has a multicultural character. It was amazing to be there, celebrating the connections of these cultures together. I want to give a special shout-out to Diana, who did an amazing job organising all of this, and everybody in the Indonesian cultural and arts association.

### Sima Garfield

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (10:02): I am going to rush through this, but there is a fair bit of story that I cannot tell given the time constraints. My mother-in-law Sima Garfield, born Sima Szymkiewicz on 1 September 1943, died a couple of weeks ago. She had quite a story. She was born in the woods outside of Poland for the reason that she was Jewish. Her mother, when she was pregnant with Sima, escaped Auschwitz and eventually ended up living in a cave. The reason they lived in a cave was fairly simple. If they had been caught by the Germans, they would have been killed outright. But while she was in the cave, she caught tuberculosis – tuberculosis of the lungs and the hips, which is quite rare. They were eventually captured. We are not sure who it was because it was hard to get anything out of them, but it was probably by the Soviets because they are still alive. After the war ended, Sima ended up in a hospital in Switzerland and had to stay there for another six years after her mum came to Australia. When they eventually caught up, they were more or less strangers. Sima came to Australia, lived in Elwood, moved through her life and eventually found someone to marry called George Garfinkiel. He changed his name to Garfield because it was a bit easier. But fate was not done with Sima just yet. George died when my wife Nicole was five years old, in 1980, so Sima was left holding the baby, just about literally, for another many, many years. As time went on, Sima built quite a circle of people around her. I have known her for nearly 30 years now, and it was only in recent years that she was comfortable enough to talk to me about a lot of things. I will miss her. It is another part of the generation that way too many people pretend do not exist – the Holocaust survivors that were children. Godspeed, Sima.

### *Production of documents*

#### Cranbourne rail line

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:04): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the significant population growth in the Clyde North area within the City of Casey, which has placed increasing pressure on existing transport infrastructure;
  - (b) that local residents, community groups, and stakeholders in the City of Casey have been calling for an extension of the Cranbourne line for more than 10 years;
  - (c) that public confidence in such projects is best upheld through open access to relevant documentation and business cases; and
- (2) in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within eight weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, documents related to any business proposal, funding agreement or feasibility study between the federal government and the Victorian government

concerning an extension of the Cranbourne train line, including but not limited to, all business cases, cost-benefit analyses, economic assessments, and feasibility studies prepared for, or by, either the federal government or the Victorian government.

A bit of background: for nearly 30 years there has been discussion of extending the Cranbourne train line to Clyde. Steve Bracks promised to do it in 1999, and the Labor Party promised to do it again in 2002. In 2018 the Labor government pledged to duplicate the line to Cranbourne as a prerequisite to the Clyde rail link extension. Thankfully, the government have duplicated the line to Cranbourne, and assuming there was not money funnelled to organised crime, probably this is an example of a good infrastructure project, but the Clyde rail extension, sadly, remains a dream. For residents of the outer south-east, this project is an important priority, with one community survey in Casey stating that 97 per cent of residents support the Clyde rail link project. The Cranbourne duplication has been completed for years. For people out on that side of town, this is a project that would transform one of the fastest developing areas of Australia.

Apparently there has been a business case developed. Somebody somewhere – and presumably a Victorian government department – has a copy of it, and apparently it was the federal government that did this business case. Deciding whether or not this is a project that should proceed is a discussion that would be better informed by seeing the actual work that has apparently been done to understand the costs, benefits and possible cost of the project. It is something that has been raised with me by stakeholders in the south-east, and it is something that should be a public document for the consideration of residents of the south-east and other Victorians that want to consider infrastructure spending.

I will make the point to the Leader of the Government in this place that, as we do not know the exact name of the document, the production order necessarily is a bit wider than what I would otherwise ask for. I am happy to use our new mechanisms to narrow down to the exact document, because I am really after just that one document, which is the business case, but as I do not know what it is called, I necessarily had to cast a wider net. But I am sure the government can make use of these new procedures to give us just the single document that we need. I urge all members to support this motion asking for the production of that business case.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:07): I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion that has been put forward by Mr Limbrick today. This is something that is of particular interest – of keen interest – to me and my colleague Mr Tarlamis, who is in the chamber for this debate as well. At the outset I state that I am very pleased to be speaking in favour of this documents motion, and I very much look forward to the conversations that will ensue as a result. It is a very important subject and indeed one that I have had many good conversations with people in my community about. Even though I do not represent the majority of Clyde, I do have Clyde North indeed as well as Cranbourne East and surrounding areas in my electorate, and whether it is with key stakeholders or local residents out on the doors, this is a frequent topic of conversation and I know something that we are all very keen to see into the long term.

There is quite a history to this project, as Mr Limbrick has outlined, and yes, he is quite right to note that it has been a key topic of conversation for about 30 years, because of course it was 30 years ago that the Liberal Party closed the rail service to Clyde. There was previously a rail service to Clyde and indeed on to Koo Wee Rup all the way as far as Leongatha, but that was closed and cut back by the Liberal government, as is their wont. The area continues to evolve and continues to grow, and whilst we see significant investment in rail infrastructure across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, including in the south-east – and I could happily talk about level crossing removals across the entire Pakenham and Cranbourne lines, I could talk about of course the Metro Tunnel and I could spend a lot of time talking about the recent bus upgrades that have been undertaken into the area as well to quickly respond in line with population – I will also note that Mr Limbrick outlined the commitment of the then Andrews Labor government in 2018 to duplicate the line as a prerequisite. That is entirely correct, and it is entirely sensible as that it is the right thing to do. The Cranbourne line previously was a single track, bar possibly one or two passing loops, all the way from Dandenong

through Lynbrook and Merinda Park to Cranbourne. Extending a line onto that existing network would have been the equivalent of building a brand new freeway with three lanes each way and funnelling all that traffic onto a single-lane road. It would not have been a viable solution. It is correct that the government has identified that as a priority and indeed, in accordance with its commitment, has delivered on that, and in doing so it has fully duplicated the Cranbourne line between Dandenong and Cranbourne and delivered a major upgrade to Merinda Park station.

The prerequisite infrastructure is there, which indeed does make this a timely opportunity to discuss future possibilities and future options, which Mr Limbrick also went to in talking about how he believes this may be a federal document. Indeed we are in a position where it is a very good thing that Victoria is now receiving a decent federal buy-in to our infrastructure spend. Although I will note that even though we have come up to 50 per cent parity with the federal government on major infrastructure projects, we still have not been – I do not know if ‘compensated’ is the right word, but it still has not made up for the nine years of complete neglect from the former Liberal government, which did not invest a single dollar into major city-shaping projects such as the Metro Tunnel. Those are projects that the state have had to put more funds into, to go it alone, because we were not prepared to wait for the stagnant Liberal Party to get their act together. They were completely ignoring the interests of Victorians. We wanted to go it alone because the alternative of waiting was not an option. A lot of funds have then gone towards other major projects such as the Metro Tunnel, which is indeed directly servicing and benefiting communities along the Pakenham and Cranbourne corridor today. But there is certainly more work to be done, and it is an area that I am very excited to be deeply engaged in.

I do say, though, of course, to reiterate the point, that does not mean that we are sitting on our laurels by any means. Through this very budget we have seen major extensions and upgrades of local bus services announced, including routes 795, 896 and 897, which will directly go along that corridor, as well as indeed route 888 down to Clyde from Berwick, providing that network connection. That follows up on previous extensions of the bus network too. I am very excited to have this conversation, and long may we have many more conversations on this very important future project. But in the meantime we are also not waiting; we are getting on with delivering not only road upgrades in the area but also significant bus upgrades year after year after year into Clyde North, into Cranbourne East and into Clyde itself as this area grows.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:12): I rise as well to support Mr Limbrick’s motion on the release of these documents. There has been absolutely huge support in the community for the extension of this rail line. There is currently a live petition to take it even further and to extend the rail line from Cranbourne to Koo Wee Rup, and at the moment, as it stands, there are well over 4000 signatures. I just want to put that in because this is not an outlier of an issue.

This project that was spoken about – and there has been, of course, not surprisingly, some blaming of the Liberals for this, regardless of the fact that the government have been in power for the last 12 years. But here are some facts: this is a project that Labor promised in 1999 and failed to deliver in 1999 – broken promise number 1 on this issue. Then they promised it in 2002. Guess what, they did not deliver it then. They broke their promise again. Then, third time unlucky, because here we are in 2006 and they have promised it again. While they are blaming the Liberals or the coalition or whoever knows – maybe George Washington! – while they are blaming everyone else, they failed to deliver it. This is an area that is growing over and over, and it is one of the many reasons I support the release of this document. These numbers might be out of date, because it has been a long time since they promised and failed and promised and failed. We are not allowed to say that anyone in particular is lying, but I think as a government you can collectively absolutely know that they have lied three times on this project. But regardless, \$3 billion was the amount that they said that it would probably cost to pay for this project.

It is amazing to put this into perspective, and I will do that right now. This is why integrity in government matters, because if they say they are going to deliver something, it should not be to buy

your vote; it should be because they are going to deliver it. The fact that in 1999, 2002 and 2006 they stayed true to form and just promised whatever they wanted, took your votes and then completely treated Victorians with contempt is one reason why integrity matters, because you should not be lied to. The second reason that integrity matters is that this was costed at around \$3 billion. If there was proper integrity in this state, we could have used that \$15 billion that was lost to corruption, which experts say is a conservative number, to build this train line not once, not twice, not three times, not four times but five times over. I just want to highlight that that is why integrity in politics matters. Next time – and it will probably happen very soon – when you have a Labor candidate or a Labor member standing in front of you saying, ‘We’re going to deliver this line,’ they probably will also, like Mr Galea, say, ‘You should be thankful because of the Metro Tunnel.’

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, President, Dr Heath needs to be very careful not to misrepresent here, because this Labor government in 2014, 2018 and 2022 did not make the promise that she is alleging. If she wants to go back as far as decades ago, we can talk about Jeff Kennett closing the rail line in 1993.

**The PRESIDENT:** It is not a point of order.

**Renee HEATH:** You have just eaten 40 seconds or so of my short time.

**A member:** It was a good contribution.

**Renee HEATH:** Not really. Ms Gray-Barberio asked for a very similar document recently. She asked for the Upfield line railway study, a 2017 document. In August 2025 the Attorney-General wrote back to the chamber saying that they needed more time. They have not handed it down. I am raising that because we have now had years of requesting documents, and I am really not sure how many we have seen. We are still waiting for the towers. We have got two documents motions every Wednesday, and just like an alarm clock – it is that reliable – the Clerk stands up and says, ‘Sorry, the government won’t deliver them because they need more time.’ Integrity matters. I hope you deliver these documents. I am very thankful to Mr Limbrick for bringing this forward, and I commend the motion to the house.

**Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:17):** I am going to join with my colleague Mr Galea in saying that the government will not oppose this documents motion before us, as has been convention in many sessions before this, and just speak a little bit about the government’s history in delivering transport in the south-east suburbs, because the truth is this is an area that is booming – there is no doubt about it – and it is only Labor that has a plan to make sure the vibrant parts of our state have the public transport infrastructure that they need.

Let me talk about the Metro Tunnel, because that needs conversation today. It is the centrepiece of Labor’s commitment to public transport services in the south-east and is undoubtedly the biggest transformation of our public transport network since the opening of the city loop, which is, what, 40 years old now? Earlier this year, on 1 February, we had the long-awaited big switch, which added a thousand new turn-up-and-go services to the key south-east Cranbourne and Pakenham lines. That is more trains more often and faster commutes right into the city. Some in this place tried to block the construction of the Metro Tunnel, but Labor indeed got on with the job – no thanks to our friends in Canberra at the time, who, frankly, neglected us. We funded it ourselves. We finished it ahead of schedule, and it is already making the lives of the residents of Melbourne’s south-east easier from Cranbourne to Caulfield and from Pakenham to Prahran.

Of course while the Metro Tunnel is an important part of our investment in linking our rail network from the south-east to the west, it is just one piece of the puzzle. There are two key south-eastern lines in Pakenham and Cranbourne. They are now level crossing free. For those that make their way into the city of by car, that is less time in traffic. There are shorter commutes for those on the train and even more services to get them to where they need to go.

I am not just going to talk about trains – and I do appreciate that this motion does speak to train services – because buses too have significantly been uplifted under the leadership of this government. I pay respect to the Minister for Public and Active Transport Gabrielle Williams because, especially in the growth corridors, we have seen an investment in buses, and our government have invested \$100 million into delivering better bus services to complement the thousand new turn-up-and-go train services on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines. There are upgraded and extended routes across the key growth areas in this community: Clyde, Cranbourne East, Clyde North, Berwick and Devon Meadows. I have had the good fortune of speaking to both Mr Galea and Mr Tarlamis today about the bus services that have been uplifted right there in their community, and I know that they are very much appreciated. It means that even those on the urban fringe can see the benefits of a project like the Metro Tunnel, with the bus works they need to connect those new estates to the stations and take residents into the city for work, study and hospitals – whatever it is that they need.

While Labor invests in what really are state-shaping infrastructure projects that make lives easier for all Victorians, we know that this motion was introduced to continue to spread theories about what the government is doing when it comes to transport infrastructure projects. I know members are opposed to the Metro Tunnel and opposed to free public transport and any measures that really do make life easier for those that live in the South-East Metropolitan Region. More concerning, though, is the connection between those in the Libertarian Party and the Liberal Party. I have heard time and time again from those opposite – what was it? – ‘The Metro Tunnel is a hoax, and it’s never going to happen.’ They have opposed dozens of level crossing removals, and we know that they would cut services and close train stations if given the chance. Sadly, if the Liberal Party had their way, commuters from right across the south-east would be spending their time waiting behind boom gates, perhaps waiting for a train that they opposed on the Metro Tunnel or the increased services that it absolutely provides.

Only Labor can be trusted to fight for the public transport infrastructure that the south-east needs. I could speak about public transport right across Melbourne every moment I am right behind this mike. But for now can I just say that the critical investments into the South-East Metropolitan Region and the booming communities there are being met by investment from state Labor when it comes to buses and trains right across the line. I have had the good fortune of being with many members on the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines since the opening of the Metro Tunnel, and I know how much of a significant difference that has made to their experiences. I encourage all members to get behind some really critical, important public infrastructure projects that our state enjoys.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:22): I also rise to support the motion by Mr Limbrick regarding the extension of rail in the City of Casey to Cranbourne East and Clyde. I had the great pleasure of being the candidate for Cranbourne for the Liberal Party in 2018, and this was a Liberal election promise that we went to the election with. It was probably the most exciting election promise that I was part of. I know that the people in Cranbourne and Clyde were looking forward to having this railway line extended, and they were looking forward to having a station in both Cranbourne East and Clyde. Documents from the City of Casey show that some plans show that the actual station was going to be at Casey Fields, which would have been great for those who were actually going to a sporting event. It would be wonderful to be able to catch the train and get off at Casey Fields. Other plans show that it could stop near Blue Hills Residences, which is an area of course with a huge retirement village at the back, and that could have allowed those people to be able to use that as well. Also, the line was to be extended into Clyde, which has now gone from being a very sleepy country area to being a huge growth corridor.

I am very, very familiar with the line. I am familiar with the old train tracks that were dismantled and needed to be refitted, and I am very, very aware that once upon a time this was a railway line that had been used to transport goods into country areas. It now needs to be fit for purpose, and that is why it needs to be extended. The old line was used for a very different purpose by diesel trains. These days we now need to have a new line with a duplication that will take it to these areas.

I want to reiterate that it is nothing like what Labor is trying to say. They are saying that the Liberals would never do anything like this, and I can tell you that in 2018 that was our election commitment to the people of Cranbourne and Clyde, and it was a great announcement that was made with Matthew Guy at the time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Construction industry**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:25): I move:

That this house, in accordance with standing order 10.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 14 days of this resolution being agreed to, all documents, including briefs, correspondence, advice and reports, created since 1 January 2022, held by the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, the Minister for Industrial Relations, the Department of Transport and Planning, the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, WorkSafe Victoria, or the Labour Hire Authority relating to:

- (1) the engagement, subcontracting or payment of Women in Construction Pty Ltd, Rock Solid Civil Contractors Pty Ltd, or any associated entity on Victorian government-funded construction or transport infrastructure projects;
- (2) any probity, due diligence or labour hire licensing checks concerning those entities, their directors, senior managers, or persons exercising control or influence over them;
- (3) any complaints, concerns or investigations concerning those entities, including matters relating to criminal associations, workplace conduct, family violence or outlaw motorcycle gang involvement;
- (4) any briefing or correspondence to or from a minister or ministerial office concerning those entities; and
- (5) any decision, proposed decision, assessment, review or enforcement action by the Labour Hire Authority relating to the labour hire licence of Women in Construction Pty Ltd or any associated entity.

I am delighted to move my documents motion, which covers the depth of corruption that is symbolic of this government. Jacinta Allan's Women in Construction program funnelled taxpayer money to a company owned by a convicted domestic violence offender linked to bikies and organised crime. Just think about this: this company, Women in Construction Pty Ltd, has been allowing a man of very poor character, to put it politely, to profit to the tune of \$2.5 million a week from programs designed to – and I quote the Labor press release from 2009 – ‘encourage more women to consider a career in construction.’ This is a catastrophic failure. Labor spent years boasting about getting more women into construction. Now Victorians are seeing where some of that money went. Let us remind ourselves that at least \$15 billion has been skimmed off the top, stolen from Victorian taxpayers and funnelled to their disgraced mates at the CFMEU, to bikies and to criminals. We have seen scandal after scandal unfold. We have seen women subjected to the most horrific abuse on construction sites. We have seen women brutally assaulted by a health and safety officer who had only just been released from prison. There have been reports of drug use, strippers and violence directed at women and Indigenous Victorians, yet the Premier will not actually admit to the public through the media that there has been any corruption happening on Victoria's construction sites. We are seeing it before our eyes. It is obvious for anyone to see.

These incidents have come at a significant cost and have exposed a culture that Victorians rightly expect to be stamped out. Victorians deserve a royal commission to chase down every single cent of the \$15 billion rorted from taxpayers on Big Build projects, but of course Jacinta Allan will never call a royal commission, because she has too much to hide. Of course she had to IBAC-flip on follow-the-money powers, but not until 2028.

We have seen only this week how this tired Labor government seeks to cover their tracks, and we saw it briefed over the weekend and the last couple of days: CFMEU corruption coming up while doorknocking. I was certainly getting stopped in the street at a listening post the other day up in Meadow Heights about the \$15 billion. Everyone knows about the \$15 billion. It is very common for punters to come up to you and ask about it. Unlike those on the other side, we have got a clear plan: when we come to government, we will immediately move to introduce follow-the-money powers; we

will immediately call a royal commission; we will immediately establish construction enforcement Victoria – a tough cop on the beat on construction sites; and we will immediately reintroduce the successful construction code that was supported under the Napthine government and abolished by Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan as a sop to the CFMEU to allow them to run rampant on Victorian construction sites. That has directly led to \$15 billion being rorted from the taxpayer. But this Premier does not care. She will do whatever it takes to cover up for the fact that she was responsible for allowing the CFMEU dominance – the ‘CFMEU monopoly’ as one Labor MP called it – to run rampant over construction sites in Victoria, which has led to the \$15 billion being stolen. As my friend the Leader of the Opposition Jess Wilson said:

Jacinta Allan wants the headline today and the investigation after the election.

If these powers are needed, they should start now.

Those opposite have a bit of egg on their faces, because they all voted against these follow-the-money powers last year. As one Labor MP said in the *Australian Financial Review* on the condition of anonymity:

This is a deflection of historic proportions ... Anything short of a royal commission is not good enough. Jacinta, Daniel [Andrews] and Tim Pallas handed over a monopoly to thugs disguised as unionism, who then used that monopoly cartel power at the expense of taxpayers.

I know there are some Labor MPs that do know how bad this is, and we need to get to the bottom of the Women in Construction scandal. I also note, because I know there were a few questions at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the Schindler scandal, that taxpayers were rorted over \$7 million for damaged lifts that were never actually damaged by a company. The minister said that it was referred to police, and Victoria Police put out an extraordinary statement saying they did not receive any allegations of criminality. If Jacinta Allan says the standard is that all things should be immediately referred to police, you would think she would accept the same standard from her Minister for Transport Infrastructure, but that has not been the case under this government.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:31): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Mulholland’s motion with respect to several labour hire and associated entities and the broader question of government infrastructure projects and in particular the way that labour hire licensing checks are conducted, documents relating to complaints and concerns, and decisions or proposed decisions with respect to Women in Construction. The first thing, absolutely, as we have said again and again and again in this place, is that there is zero tolerance and there must be zero tolerance for illegal activity anywhere, but particularly in the construction sector. Those who have evidence of illegal activity taking place in the construction sector should make reports to Victoria Police, and that is what the government has done. Victoria Police has a taskforce, Taskforce Hawk, which has been established to investigate wrongdoing in the construction sector. As at the end of March, Taskforce Hawk had charged 22 people with 88 offences. That is Victoria Police doing their job of tackling crime that exists in the construction sector.

What we have also got here, though, is not just Victoria Police doing their job but the labour hire licensing authority doing their job to make sure that we do not have people holding labour hire licences in this state who should not. That is a central tenet of the documents motion moved by Mr Mulholland. I want to spend a little bit of time just reflecting on the gall that it seems is coming out of the opposition, who are calling for documents on an agency that they do not think should exist, because the Liberal Party does not support the licensing of labour hire operators in the state of Victoria. The Liberal Party does not think we should have a labour hire licensing authority in the state of Victoria, and we know that because they voted against its creation. Back in 2018 the Liberal Party in this place spoke against and voted against the need for a labour hire licensing authority here in Victoria. They did not want to have someone looking at conduct and appropriateness and having a system in place to ensure that those people working on construction sites in this state through labour hire arrangements were properly licensed. That is their track record. So you will have to forgive me if it is a little hard to take the

indignation from the Liberal Party, asking the government to produce documents about an authority that they do not think should exist.

But I think it is a little bit worse than that, because that is not just a position that they had in the dim, dark past. We had, in December last year, the shadow minister Mr Welch get up in this place and attempt to remove provisions in the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 that would allow the authority to publish and disclose actions that it is taking against people that it does not think are fit and proper to hold a licence. He got up here in this chamber less than six months ago to the day and said:

We would like to remove the provision that the Labour Hire Authority can publish details of someone it is considering exercising a power against ...

They wanted to remove the provision that allowed the Labour Hire Authority to issue a notice last month saying that it wants to cancel the licence of the very firm that Mr Mulholland is asking questions about and seeking documents about. Six months ago they did not want us to be able to do it, and now they have the gall to stand up in here and ask for documents about it. The hypocrisy is astounding. I think that what the Liberal Party are doing is just playing politics. They do not care about fit and proper persons in the construction industry. They do not want to have a proper system of licensing of labour hire in the state of Victoria. They have been against it since 2018, and they were against it last year.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:36): I am pleased – or not pleased, but it is my duty – to rise and support Mr Mulholland’s motion under standing order 10.01 requiring:

... the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within 14 days of this resolution being agreed to, all documents, including briefs, correspondence, advice and reports, created since 1 January 2022, held by the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, the Minister for Industrial Relations, the Department of Transport and Planning, the Victorian Infrastructure Delivery Authority, WorkSafe Victoria, or the Labour Hire Authority relating to:

- (1) the engagement, subcontracting or payment of Women in Construction Pty Ltd, Rock Solid Civil Contractors Pty Ltd, or any associated entity on Victorian government-funded construction or transport infrastructure projects;
- (2) any probity, due diligence or labour hire licensing ...
- (3) any complaints, concerns or investigations ...
- (4) any briefing or correspondence to or from a minister or ministerial office concerning those entities; and
- (5) any decision, proposed decision, assessment, review or enforcement ...

on these matters. This government is rotten to the core. It is a corrupt government that has over 14 years now allowed the systemic roting of taxpayers money, the siphoning off of billions of dollars – at least \$15 billion, maybe \$30 billion – to corrupt payments to unions, to bikie groups, to strippers, to the full works of corrupt payment through these building sites. The Big Build has been delivering projects across the state, but the projects are inevitably over budget massively, and in some cases it is not simply the incompetence of the government, it is the frank and outright corruption that is involved. This is a corrupt government. It is a government that is out of control and a government that needs to be reined in. This documents motion is in the public interest because the community should be able to see these documents. Many documents –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** Well, let me just say the corrupt members on the other side have allowed this to occur year by year by year. The Labor Party members have been happy to allow this to happen.

**Ryan Batchelor:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis just accused members on this side of being corrupt, and I think that is unparliamentary.

**David DAVIS:** On the point of order, Acting President, I am entitled to use that matter and description about an entity like a political party.

**Ryan Batchelor:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis did not say ‘members of the Labor Party’, he said ‘the corrupt members opposite’.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** I uphold the point of order. Mr Davis, you know more than most the language that you can and cannot use in this chamber.

**David DAVIS:** I withdraw my statement that the corrupt members opposite –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Please withdraw without qualification.

**David DAVIS:** I withdraw without qualification, Acting President. I want to be clear, though: the Labor Party, who do sit opposite in this chamber, are a corrupt party. They are crooked to the core. Many of them should be in jail; there is no question about that.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Mr Davis, please withdraw that last comment.

**David DAVIS:** Many of them ought to be in jail. That is the truth. And not necessarily all in this chamber; there may be some in the other chamber too.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea):** Mr Davis, this is not a new substantive motion. This is the motion which Mr Mulholland has raised. I ask you to withdraw that last comment before continuing to speak on this motion.

**David DAVIS:** I withdraw. On this motion, this is a documents motion, and it is in the public interest that these documents see the light of day. Part of the corrupt behaviour of the Labor Party has been to block FOIs, block documents motions and block the release of damaging documents that actually shed a light on what is occurring with this government. What we have seen with this government and the Labor Party over these 14 years is a developing habit of corruption and a developing habit of behaviour where they look the other way or they actually actively support these matters. The members in this chamber have got a responsibility to stand up and to fight against some of the ministers who are clearly actively involved in this failure to tackle the corruption – the ministers who have looked the other way. Jacinta Allan is, obviously, the Premier and was the Minister for Transport Infrastructure for a long period and the Minister for Public Transport before that, and many of these projects have occurred on her watch. She knew about this corruption and allowed it to happen or ought to have known. She ought to have known, and much was brought to her attention. We have a series of FOIs that actually sit with these matters, some of which would even overlap with this important motion today to try and get to the bottom of the corruption within the Labor Party. This is something that is costing taxpayers dearly – the money that has been squandered through these deliberate, corrupt payments by the Labor Party, corrupt payments that have accessed taxpayers money, taxpayers money that could have been used to more adequately fund hospitals and schools and roads. You can see our roads are in a terrible situation, and that is in part because the money has been siphoned off for corrupt payments.

**Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:42):** Listening to Mr Davis is just an example of the Liberal Party. You heard him rant on for 5 minutes, and not once did he mention, as is general for his contributions, working people in Victoria and the quality of life of people in Victoria. It is just absolute tripe. He has probably been using the same words for his whole political career; it does not matter what the issue of the day is. He is not sitting down and establishing policies that improve people’s lives. I am proud to be part of a party that does go about that work. The fact that the Labor Party puts front and centre improving diversity in workplaces, including in construction workplaces, is something that I am incredibly proud of, because we get better outcomes when we have diverse workplaces. We have got a motion coming up on this a little bit later today. I might give the Liberals a bit of a reminder of the lack of diversity in their workplaces, particularly with their federal colleagues, and what a disaster that has been for them.

As my colleague Mr Batchelor said, this government has zero tolerance for illegal behaviour, through Taskforce Hawk and the charges for offences and through the Labour Hire Authority cancelling

153 licences. Yet again Mr Batchelor raised the fact that the Liberals did not support the Labour Hire Authority because they do not support the improved pay and conditions of Victorians workplaces. You do not care about worker safety. You do not care about seeing that families have more pay in their pocket at the end of the day and are able to spend that money with their family and in their communities; it is not in your DNA. It is not in your DNA to work up policies that improve the quality of life of Victorians, and you do not put the time into that. You do not put in the time, and that is why you come to election after election without policies that improve the lives of Victorians. I am proud to be part of a party that does that to ensure that, whether it is women getting into apprenticeships – I am going to run out of time, so I will save it for the for the motion coming up later.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (10:45): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) Victoria's deepening integrity crisis, including the continued delay of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's (IBAC) long-awaited Operation Richmond report, allegations of CFMEU corruption on Big Build projects, and the Watson report's estimate that corrupt conduct may have cost Victorian taxpayers up to \$15 billion;
  - (b) that \$15 billion is not an abstract figure, but money that could have funded hospitals, ambulances, mental health beds, schools, roads and essential public services in a state burdened by record debt and failing to meet basic service standards;
- (2) condemns the revelation that Women in Construction Pty Ltd, a labour hire company that won major Big Build work under Labor's gender equity policy, was founded by a convicted domestic violence offender, managed by a jailed drug trafficker facing further charges, and used by bikie gang bosses from the Bandidos and Comancheros to place associates on taxpayer-funded projects earning up to \$300,000 a year;
- (3) notes that this firm operated while the Premier was the responsible minister, was granted a new CFMEU enterprise bargaining agreement as recently as February 2025, and that the Labour Hire Authority moved to rescind its licence only after media exposure;
- (4) calls on the government to support publication of the Operation Richmond report and stronger 'follow-the-money' powers for IBAC; and
- (5) affirms that Victorians deserve to know whether public money was spent in the public interest, or funnelled to the crooks, bikies and abusers of women that Labor's Big Build has enriched.

I move this motion without any particular pleasure but because it is necessary. It concerns something that this house should not look away from, and despite our limitation to directly control it, we are duty bound to keep on looking, keep on talking and keep on fighting. I am talking of course about Victoria's deepening integrity crisis – as my motion states, specifically the suppressed IBAC Operation Richmond report, the rot of CFMEU corruption on the Big Build and Geoffrey Watson SC's devastating estimate that corrupt conduct has cost Victorian taxpayers up to \$15 billion and counting. My motion condemns also the grotesque scandal of Women in Construction Pty Ltd, a so-called women-led labour hire firm that won major Big Build contracts under Labor's own gender equity policy, only to be exposed as a vehicle for convicted domestic violence offenders, drug traffickers and bikie bosses. It calls on the government to finally release the Richmond report and give IBAC the follow-the-money powers it has begged for since 2017.

This is not just another list of scandals. Last time I spoke on integrity here I talked about the quiet contract between government and the people – how Victorians tolerate the theatre and mistakes of politics so long as those in power protect the public purse, respect the public trust and do not abuse the authority they have been given. They do not really want to think about politics; they want to get on

with their lives. But today I want to talk about the how: how has this happened, and what does it tell us about the state of democracy in Victoria? Well, it is not good. The starting point is this: corruption is not a weed that springs up at random by bad luck. It is not just a few rotten apples. Bad people will always try to get close to public money. Crooks will always try to exploit a weak system. The scandal is that Labor has built a system so politicised, so incurious and so captured by its own allies that it let them in.

If you want to understand how \$15 billion of Victoria's money could be siphoned off to criminals, to bikies and to the abusers of women, do not start with the criminals. Start with a different question: who turned off the lights? I am afraid the answer is obvious. It was this Labor government. Here is a list – it is by no means definitive. This is a government which has debased question time until the question is met not with an answer but with a sneer. They guillotine debate and ram through legislation that is neither examined nor improved. They have turned the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee into a ministerial protection racket. They sit through public inquiries and answer nothing. They let freedom-of-information requests die of old age. They hide billion-dollar projects behind commercial in confidence. They starve the integrity agencies of the budget and the powers they need and then undermine the people of standing – Geoffrey Watson, Robert Redlich, Deborah Glass – who dare to point it out. They have politicised the public service until advice is no longer fearless but compliant and politicised appointments until plum positions go to former Labor ministers and mates rather than to merit. They pork-barrel public money into the seats they want and withhold it from communities that vote the wrong way. They run taxpayer-funded government information campaigns that are nothing but Labor advertising. They massage the figures and announce surpluses that evaporate on contact with reality. They award the contracts to their friends and make their promises to their donors, their unions and their favoured law firms. And when a council steps out of line, they install a monitor or two or wield the code of conduct to bring it to heel, all while the Premier's office swells with an army of advisers, media managers and social media operatives whose entire purpose is to manage what you are permitted to see.

Corruption does not begin or end with money in a suitcase or a brown paper bag. When we are talking about Victoria's grey corruption crisis, it is not the sort of corruption that fits neatly into a criminal charge, but it is corrosive all the same. It is what happens when government ceases to see public money as belonging to the public and starts to see it as a fund to manage political problems, reward political allies and silence political opposition.

Women in Construction Pty Ltd was not operating in some distant corner of the economy. It was not a small business somewhere far removed from government. It was supplying labour to Labor's own Big Build – the signature project of this government and the great monument to its spending, its debt and its whole political identity. The *Age* has reported that the company, which presented itself as a leading women-led supplier of female workers on Labor's Big Build, was in fact owned by a male serial domestic violence abuser, managed by a male drug trafficker also facing family violence charges and deeply connected to bikies and violent criminals. It reportedly supplied dozens of female workers on the North East Link and, at its height, up to 250 workers across multiple Big Build rail and road projects, generating an estimated \$2.5 million a week. A company trading off the language of women's participation and gender equality was allegedly a vehicle by which underworld figures, bikies and violent men could profit from taxpayer-funded infrastructure projects. A policy sold to Victorians as a way to protect and empower women appears to have been exploited by people with records and associations that should have set every alarm bell ringing.

How could something so awful and so immoral happen? It is because to Labor the Big Build became more than an infrastructure program; it became a political economy. It created contracts, jobs, unions, contractors, consultants, lobbyists, advisers and political beneficiaries all tied to the government's central political story. Naturally, when a program becomes that politically important, the temptation is always to protect the story rather than protect the taxpayer. That is why Labor cannot properly confront

this scandal. It is why they do not want a royal commission. It is why they are delaying powers for IBAC. They have too much to lose and too much to hide. Instead we get deflection on an epic scale.

Just two days ago, after months of blocking, dodging and voting down legislation introduced by the coalition and the Greens, the Premier suddenly stood up and announced a sweeping plan to give IBAC the follow-the-money investigatory powers it has been begging for since 2017. The Premier stood before the cameras and declared that she had zero tolerance for criminal behaviour and that these far-reaching powers will be made retrospective so that nothing is off limits. It sounded impressive; you can certainly see the headline they wanted. But when you read the fine print of the government's announcement, you realise the cover-up is still very much alive. If these powers are so desperately needed, if the haemorrhage of public cash is so severe and if the Premier is truly no longer satisfied that IBAC has the tools it needs, then why is the government forcing IBAC to wait until late 2027 to actually get them? If these powers are urgent enough to announce today, why are they not urgent enough to legislate today? The answer is painfully obvious. The government has established an expert reference group to drag out the process.

This is a deliberate, cynical political choice designed to ensure that no real independent financial tracing can occur until after the upcoming election. Jacinta Allan wants the headline today, but she wants the actual investigation safely buried until the votes are counted. They are asking Victorians to wait another 18 months while the rorts continue and the evidence disappears. We see the exact pattern of suppression in the fate of IBAC's Operation Richmond report. This crucial investigation into the conduct of the Labor government's dealings with the United Firefighters Union back in 2016 has been completed. It is ready for publication, yet it remains completely suppressed from public scrutiny, blocked by endless aggressive court actions just months before Victorians go to the polls. How can the people of Victoria have any confidence that Labor will genuinely expose corruption on the very Big Build projects that they commissioned, funded and politically promoted? They cannot. Even their own Labor colleagues know it. As one anonymous Labor MP told the *Australian Financial Review*:

This is a deflection of historic proportions ... Anything short of a royal commission is not good enough. Jacinta, Daniel ... and Tim Pallas handed over a monopoly to thugs disguised as unionism, who then used that monopoly cartel power at the expense of taxpayers.

The Premier was told explicitly back in 2024 that IBAC lacked the legislative power to properly investigate CFMEU and bikie corruption on Big Build sites. She chose to hide that advice. She chose to protect her union allies, her donors and her political mates rather than protect the public purse. Was the government wrong when they voted to block these identical powers in March, or are they wrong now when they say they are necessary? The only thing that changed between March and June was not the legal reality, it was the catastrophic political polling – or maybe even Jacinta's doorknocking disasters.

It is certainly like the Premier to change her mind on an inquiry, too, but it cannot be a limited political exercise. A proper inquiry would not merely ask whether a few bad actors behaved badly. It would ask how the system worked. It would ask who benefited. It would ask who knew and who should have known. It would ask why warnings were missed. It would ask why a company like Women in Construction could prosper on taxpayer-funded projects. It would ask why Labor's own policy settings and union relationships created opportunities for rorting. It would ask the question this government fears most: where did the money go? Did it go to the public interest, or did it go to crooks, bikies and abusers of women? Did it build roads, hospitals, schools and services, or did it enrich people who should never have been near public money? Did the government safeguard the taxpayer, or did it protect the political architecture of its Big Build? The sad truth is that, while we might call for this fantasy inquiry, for a royal commission, for new powers, for new laws or for integrity agency funding, any one of these would be in vain. What we need is a new government. The rot is set in too deep. The whole system is utterly, fundamentally compromised. We should be honest about where this leaves us.

My motion today asks the government to release the Richmond report and to give IBAC the powers it has sought since 2017. Those are reasonable demands, and I urge members to support them, but I make no pretence that passing this motion will fix what is broken. The government will not release what it has fought so hard to suppress and will not arm an agency it has spent a decade keeping weak. That is the lesson of this whole sorry record. The problem is not a missing power or an unpublished report, it is a government that long ago stopped seeing public money as the public's. The quiet contract I spoke of has been broken, and it cannot be repaired by the people who broke it. It can only be repaired by the people of Victoria at the ballot box.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (11:00): The Greens will be supporting this motion today, although it is frankly appalling that this motion is even necessary. The Premier's announcement this week that follow-the-money powers might be legislated in 18 months from now and that the government will consider reviewing the definition of 'corrupt conduct' is pretty startling in terms of a response to the seemingly endless stream of corruption allegations that have become a defining characteristic of this government. Putting aside that it is just the right thing to do by the Victorian people in the name of integrity, it shows a complete obliviousness to the political threat corruption poses for Labor right now. They are on the nose with voters, and it is in large part because of the stench of corruption. The old Victorian Labor approach of 'Nothing to see here', 'Never apologise' and 'Quick, look over here, we're reannouncing some funding for some shiny thing no-one asked for' is just not cutting it anymore. Voters are seeing through it, and they are fed up.

The right time to act on this was years ago. The next best time was in this chamber when the Parliament passed an IBAC reform bill. That was back when the Liberals were also more committed to IBAC reform – but more on that in a second. That was in 2023. This Parliament in this chamber passed an IBAC bill calling for wideranging reforms to IBAC. The next best time to act was when IBAC reform proposals were put on the table by the Liberals and us earlier this year. The next best time would be to act now, but the announcement kicks the can down the road once again, and no-one is buying it.

We support the Liberals push in this motion for follow-the-money powers to be given to IBAC now. It is something we supported in their bill earlier this year. However, I do have to say I find it very amusing that the Liberals talk such a big game on strengthening IBAC, yet when it comes to one of the key changes that is required – expanding IBAC's jurisdiction by broadening the definition of 'corruption' – they go weak at the knees. Despite supporting our IBAC bill in 2023 that included an expanded definition of 'corruption', they changed their tune earlier this year, refusing to support our amendments. Yesterday on ABC radio Liberal leader Jess Wilson confirmed that they do not support expanding IBAC's jurisdiction, saying that the threshold of criminal conduct was adequate – never mind that much of the alleged Big Build corruption is not conduct that meets that threshold, including what is outlined in this motion with respect to Women in Construction and the sort of grey corruption Mr Welch was interrogating the Treasurer about last night in the committee stage of the Appropriation (2026–2027) Bill 2026 and the sort that Mrs McArthur was just referencing in her contribution. It includes things like allegations of the CFMEU selling jobs for cash, organised crime figures being handed enterprise bargaining agreements and union-backed contracts and allegations that CFMEU officials enriched themselves with millions in assets gifted by contractors. As long as IBAC can only investigate corrupt conduct involving alleged serious indictable crimes or common-law offending, like bribery or misconduct in office, most of the corruption that the Liberals like to jump up and down about will never be looked into. It makes a mockery of their criticism of the government. The truth is they are not really serious about dealing with corruption or strengthening integrity in this state.

To pick up on another point Mrs McArthur made about the absolute joke that is the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, we completely agree with you. I will remind Mrs McArthur that the Liberal Party voted against our amendments, I think it was last year, that would have installed non-government chairs and ensured that the government did not have a majority on PAEC. The Liberal Party voted against that. So every time they complain about the joke that is PAEC and how it is government

controlled and it is just a big circus, I will remind them of that fact. We could have passed amendments that changed that. They chose not to support those.

Turning back to the government, though, without a firm commitment to actually implement changes to IBAC before the next election, the Premier's announcement is not any better. The Integrity and Oversight Committee made a clear set of recommendations that could and should be implemented now, but instead the government has committed to thinking about doing some of them at some stage down the track. All of it from both Liberal and Labor is just bluster – it is words without action. Meanwhile corruption runs rife through Victoria. It is not good enough. Victorians have had enough. They are struggling to get by day to day, to put food on the table, to pay for medication and to put a roof over their heads, and they see a government that does not think that allegations of \$15 billion of public money being lost to corruption are worth a proper and urgent investigation – a government that will say and do anything to stay in power yet is at real risk of losing that power because what it is saying and doing is not what the Victorian public are demanding.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:06): I am pleased to rise to speak on this motion. It is a hotchpotch motion, I have got to say; a lot of issues are crammed in here. The theme of this speech is probably going to be addressing some of the blatant inaccuracies and falsehoods that were added by Mrs McArthur in the course of her contribution, because many of them simply cannot stand. Part of the challenge I think we have is that, particularly when we are having debates about integrity and integrity legislation, details matter and being accurate matters, and some of the things that Mrs McArthur said in her contribution were just legally wrong and need to be corrected.

I will go to the first of them. Mrs McArthur, in her motion, makes reference to the Operation Richmond report and said in her contribution today that the government should release the Operation Richmond report. The government does not have the Operation Richmond report. The Operation Richmond report is with IBAC. IBAC is an independent agency of the Parliament. It is not part of the executive government and not subject to the control of a minister. It is independent. IBAC's decisions about its release schedule for its reports are a matter for it. As IBAC itself has said recently, it has been taken to court, not by the government but by another party, to prevent the release of that report. Facts matter.

Mrs McArthur said things that were not factually true, and they need to be corrected, because when you are willing to stand up in a debate like this on integrity questions that matter deeply and say things that are not true, it casts a shadow over everything else that people say, because it demonstrates they are not across the detail and they are not across the very particular elements of the integrity system that they are purporting to defend and uphold and call for the expansion of. Therefore it undermines their credibility and undermines their arguments about what the government should do when they themselves are making such fundamental mistakes. I think that the first thing we need to say is that in these debates you have got to at least start to know what you are talking about and not say things that are factually wrong. Mrs McArthur failed that first test in her contribution, and I think it says a lot about the seriousness with which the opposition does not take these matters and these issues and the details that sit under them.

Mrs McArthur, in her speech, also said that the government should increase funding to the integrity agencies. Well, this year's budget increases funding to IBAC by 5-and-a-bit per cent – by 5.4 per cent, I think – and that is quite clearly detailed in the budget papers and is in the Appropriation (Parliament 2026–2027) Bill 2026, which is on the notice paper to examine tomorrow. Funding for the integrity agencies across the board is up, and funding for IBAC this year is up by more than 5 per cent. Facts matter. Details matter.

The government has this week announced a very comprehensive response to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's (IOC) detailed report into the legislative framework for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, which was tabled in this chamber in December last year and, in accordance with the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, made its response appropriately. It is a very comprehensive response to a very comprehensive report into very detailed and complicated

legislation. I have spoken about this at length in the past, and I do not have time here to go through all of those complexities again, other than to say that I think what was demonstrated in those prior debates, when Mr Mulholland could not answer a simple question about the operational effect of the amendments that the Liberal Party were proposing – he did not know the date that his amendments would be operationally effective from and spent minutes floundering around trying to pluck a date from the air – was again that the Liberal Party cannot be taken seriously when it comes to corruption issues.

What they have also done in the last 48 hours is say, from the Leader of the Opposition's own mouth, that they do not support the totality of the government's proposed reforms to IBAC's legislation. They do not want us to go that far. They do not support what I think is one of the critical recommendations that the IOC report made and that the government has supported in principle, and that is to extend the definition of 'corrupt conduct' here in the state of Victoria. They have not at any point justified why they are opposed to the government's integrity reforms, why they are opposed to the reforms to IBAC's definition of what corrupt conduct is. They are not up for the reform task that the government is up for. They are not up for taking seriously the need to make IBAC's powers as comprehensive as they can be. The Leader of the Opposition herself on radio said they did not support the government's changes, and they have not explained why. We can only surmise that they are not serious about the need to tackle corruption in this state. They are not serious about the need to make sure that our integrity agencies have the legislative framework that is required to do their jobs properly. That is what the government is doing, that is the path the government is on and that is the core of the announcement that the Premier, the Special Minister of State and the Attorney-General made on Monday.

The other point, which we covered a little bit in the short-form documents motion earlier today, was that it is very difficult to take seriously the Liberal Party standing up here and talking about what should happen in the labour hire industry when they voted against the very body that is now undertaking the compliance activity to make sure that only fit and proper people are involved in labour hire operations here in the state of Victoria. If it was up to the Liberal Party, there would not be a Labour Hire Licensing Authority in the state of Victoria. In 2018 they voted against its creation. If it was up to the Liberal Party, there would not be a Labour Hire Licensing Authority doing an investigation into the labour hire firms that are there. Further to that, if Mr Welch had got his way in December last year, the Labour Hire Licensing Authority would not have the powers to make public that it was intending to cancel the licence of an operator. They stood here in December last year and tried to remove provisions from an amendment bill brought forward to this place by the government to give greater powers to the Labour Hire Licensing Authority that led directly last month to that authority issuing a notice that it intended to cancel the licence of the very organisation that Mrs McArthur was talking about in her speech.

You will forgive us: again on Operation Richmond, again on IBAC funding, again on the government's response to the IOC report and again on the Labour Hire Licensing Authority and its scope of powers, the Liberal Party have repeatedly demonstrated that they are not serious about integrity issues in the state of Victoria. They do not understand the complexity. They are not across the detail. They do not know basic facts. Nothing that the Liberal Party says in this debate can be taken seriously, because they have got a track record of falsehoods and voting against action that the government is taking to make sure that our regulators – whether that be the Labour Hire Licensing Authority that they voted against or whether it now be the totality of the government's response to the proposed reforms to IBAC legislation, the Liberal Party say they do not support them. We cannot take the Liberal Party seriously on matters of integrity here in the state of Victoria. They do not know what they are talking about. They keep getting things wrong. They cannot be taken seriously.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:16): Let us let us talk about this contribution that we have heard. I am very pleased to support the motion in Mrs McArthur's name. Let us talk about a hotchpotch. 'A hotchpotch,' says the speaker. What about the hotchpotch of government that we have seen over the last decade tearing down what should be good governance, tearing down what should be democracy and, within their DNA, systematically abusing taxpayer funds again and again? This is

a fundamental failure of government. It is in their DNA to have a smorgasbord – a hotchpotch smorgasbord – of corruption under Labor. When you think about this, this is taxpayer funds.

I want to go to part (b), the \$15 billion, and I know that is something that Mrs McArthur has been calling out across the chamber, as we heard from others. \$15 billion is not an abstract figure, it is a truth – that is the reality. What could it have done if it was not lining gold-plated criminal pockets? Condominiums, snort gangs, corruption, strippers – whatever it is, it has missed the pockets of people who deserve it. We are here in this place as members of Parliament, with Labor as executive government and as the custodians of taxpayer money. Well, they have abandoned that, and now they are quibbling around the outsides in relation to Johnny-come-lately follow-the-money powers that the government, after consultation in 2027, may introduce in 2028 when all is done and dusted. They hope that the polls are reversing and that with Jacinta Allan's negative 37 points or whatever it is and doorknocking in desperation in Bendigo East – with a fantastic Nationals candidate in Andrew Lethlean – they can hang on for grim death and that people will somehow be placated by these arbitrary, sometime-in-the-future follow-the-money powers. They are completely conned.

Let us talk about what could happen. We know, through the Parliamentary Budget Office – and I am not going to shy away from this; this is an important fact about this loss of \$15 billion to our Victorian community – that regional Victorians make up 25 per cent of the population, but over time, over the last years, we have been getting under half of that in our infrastructure. If you took a sliver of that \$15 billion – these are the facts, and it has been borne out by others of high integrity making that comment, Geoffrey Watson SC being one of them – with that, what could be done? One-fifth of our schools across the state are in a poor condition – that is not 'needing work', that is 'poor condition'. We can label a whole heap in my Eastern Victoria electorate that have leaking roofs and are so antiquated and in need of upgrades. We also know that our CFA volunteers are having to go cap in hand to the government. They are ageing fleets. I think there are somewhere around 700 that are well over the age of replacement, and it is on the never-never. Ten million dollars each year is absolutely not going to cut it.

If we look at the West Gippsland Hospital and talk about people there, there is a gentleman who pays taxes who owns one additional house, and he rents that out. He is not a big fat cat. He goes to the hospital with chest pains, and the hospital is completely overrun. It has fantastic people, dedicated staff, nurses and professionals who try hard. They do not have a bed for him, so he ends up in the paediatric ward. He is 6 foot 2, and he is sitting in the paediatric ward and then ends up back in the corridor. This is the sort of thing where this rorting government should be spending taxpayer funds, not lining corrupt pockets, in essence going back to its DNA.

This is an arrogant government. We saw that with the red shirts. We saw that they thought that they could get away with it. We have heard Deborah Glass come out and say that this government and Daniel Andrews at the time was an artifice. We know that this government think that they have the right to do this, and then they have got the cheek to come back and nitpick. Well, the Liberals and Nationals have a plan. We will instruct and instigate a royal commission and get rid of the rorting. We have to do it for the sake of Victorians – we will. We put through our follow-the-money policy private members bill only in March. This government rejected it, and now it is kicking the legislative tin down the road for the never-never.

I do think facts matter, and the fact of the matter is this government has been taking Victorians for a ride. And all the while this government is asking Victorians to tighten their belts. They are asking Victorians to cope with debt that is eye-watering in magnitude. They are asking Victorians to cope with lower services that are under pressure. It is completely unacceptable. All these allegations are truly shocking, and this government bats them away like it is business as usual. Well, it is not business as usual. I completely support the motion before the house. I thank the crossbench and the Greens for taking on board this motion. We have to cleanse this government, we have to have a fresh start in November and we have to bring back proper integrity into this state.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:23): I would like to start by saying that the Libertarian Party will be supporting this motion, although I am a little bit hesitant to do so. We have both major parties in this state of Victoria and federally going on and on and on about corruption and organised crime and all these things that are happening, and we talk about IBAC as if they are going to fix everything, but really what they are failing to acknowledge are the root causes, which are government policies which have set up the incentives for this organised crime to take root in Victoria.

We talk here and we wonder: ‘What about Women in Construction? How did that come about and why? Why have we got organised crime involved with Aboriginal labour hire agencies?’ Well, we know exactly what has happened here. When the Gender Equality Act 2020 went through – and I might say that was supported by the Liberal Party and in fact the only people that opposed that bill were the Libertarian Party – it created a new vector for organised crime to get involved in construction. What the government have done is set up new tick boxes on their social procurement policy, saying, ‘These companies need a gender equality action plan, and they need to be able to show that they are putting women on construction sites.’ So what organised crime does of course is set up its own labour hire agencies and set up its own arrangements with the unions, and the end result of the Gender Equality Act is that we end up with women getting exploited on construction sites. It is an absolute abomination, what has happened here. No-one wants to actually take responsibility. This act has been a total and utter failure. Not only has it not achieved its objectives, it has resulted in terrible outcomes and an expansion of organised crime.

I have spoken many times about federal excise taxes and the refusal to acknowledge the root cause of the organised crime explosion in black market tobacco – which I might add are the same people that are doing the rorts on these construction sites, the same people that are involved in drugs, the same people that are involved in illegal booze now. The automatic increases in excise taxes of course were instituted under a federal Liberal government by Malcolm Turnbull – he was the one that brought that in. No-one has actually had the guts to stand up to the big public health lobby and tell them that they have failed, tell them that they have caused an explosion in organised crime, because they are the ones that are responsible for it. In fact it has gotten so bad, these same networks that are involved in construction organised crime, involved in drugs and involved in tobacco, that there was speculation in the media – and the federal police and Victoria Police are investigating it – that some of these firebombing attacks may not actually be related to extortion and things, they are actually foreign influence in Australia.

These policies have put our national security at risk, and no-one is even taking responsibility or saying, ‘Oh, gee, maybe we made a mistake with that. Maybe we made a mistake with the Gender Equality Act. Maybe we made a mistake with our social procurement policies.’ No-one is looking at that. The Liberal Party certainly does not seem to be looking at it. Labor certainly is not looking at it. If the Liberal Party were serious, they would be coming out and saying, ‘We’re going to repeal it. We’re going to get rid of it. We’re going to have a procurement policy that just looks at the best product for the best price, from the most reputable supplier, and get rid of everything else.’ But they are not saying that. That is why the major parties are in such trouble at the moment, because Victorians see the explosion of these things, Victorians see the corruption that is happening and they do not see any answers. The answer is to get rid of some of these policies that have been either brought in or supported by both major parties in this place, and it needs to end.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:27): Thank you so much for the opportunity to rise today to speak on this motion regarding our state’s integrity framework and of course workplace safety. This motion before us provides a valuable opportunity to lay out the facts about how Victoria’s integrity institutions actually operate, what this government is doing to strengthen them and the extensive work being done on the ground to support and protect women in the workforce who are helping build this state. It is important to state clearly right from the outset that the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission is completely independent of the executive government. This total independence is a key part of our democratic system, ensuring that IBAC can provide independent

oversight free from any political influence from the government of the day. A critical part of IBAC's work is to undertake investigations, conduct examinations, handle prosecutions and produce public reports, but we must remember that the publication and timing of these reports is entirely a matter for IBAC itself. A critical element of the legislative framework that guides the publication of these documents is the natural justice process, and that process must be allowed to play out fully and independently, without any intervention from the government or the opposition. It is completely improper for those opposite to suggest that the executive government should interfere with that independent timeline.

When it comes to expanding the capabilities and powers of our integrity agencies, this government has consistently shown that we are prepared to do the heavy lifting. Just this week the Premier and the Special Minister of State from this place released the government's formal response to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's inquiry into the adequacy of the IBAC legislative framework. This committee undertook a massive amount of detailed work on what is an incredibly complex and interconnected system, and as has been said before, of the 31 recommendations made by the committee, 29 were directed to the government, and the government is supporting 21 of those recommendations in principle and placing the remaining eight under active review. The government is listening and acting in support of the principal recommendations that give IBAC the follow-the-money power, as it is known. Because Victoria's integrity framework is complex, any amendments to the IBAC act must naturally have systemwide impacts affecting multiple agencies, including Victoria Police. For this very reason follow-the-money reforms simply cannot be considered in isolation. As part of this, there is the establishment of the time-limited expert reference group, and this group will be chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and its core membership will include IBAC, the Ombudsman, Integrity Oversight Victoria and Victoria Police. This group will carefully consider the legal and operational implications of their supported recommendations and provide direct advice on their implementation, including how best to ensure that the new follow-the-money laws can be applied retrospectively.

Turning to the specific matters raised regarding transport, infrastructure and industrial relations, this government welcomes the action taken by the Labour Hire Authority to investigate deeply concerning allegations within the construction sector as we await the outcomes of those ongoing investigations. Let me state clearly that all women deserve to work free from harassment, discrimination and violence. Gender inequality is a major driver of violence against women, including workplace sexual harassment, and this government is taking real, practical action to prevent it across all priority industries. We have already announced the \$5.5 million Safe Workplaces for Women initiative, supporting three innovative programs designed to deliver advice, tools and training to both employers and employees. As part of this investment the Victorian Trades Hall Council has been funded to deliver safe workplaces training across priority industries and conduct outreach with women workers to respond directly to the issues impacting them at work. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is working closely with small to medium businesses to help employers understand their legal obligations and address gendered issues in the workplace. Furthermore, the Working Women's Centre Victoria has been funded to expand its vital legal services, education and outreach into rural and regional areas across the state. These are about equipping women with the concrete knowledge and support to identify gendered workplace issues and safely exercise their rights at work.

I am really proud – and I spoke about it with much pride – that Victoria became the first jurisdiction in Australia to pass legislation significantly restricting non-disclosure agreements in workplace sexual harassment matters, ensuring workplaces are held accountable and victim-survivors are allowed to speak openly about their experiences. Our commitment to safe and inclusive environments for women in trades extends across the massive pipeline of projects. We have implemented recommendations from the Apprenticeships Taskforce to support women to finish their training, including creating the Apprentice Helpdesk to provide a one-stop shop for advice on wages, entitlements, health and wellbeing. Because of these targeted initiatives, recent data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research reveals that nearly 80 per cent more women are training in traditionally

male-dominated trades today than there were just five years ago. We have invested \$7.9 million specifically to diversify the male-dominated construction industry, and we have established Victoria's first *Building Equality Policy*, which mandates targets and gender equality action plans on government-funded projects – over \$20 million – supported by our eight-year *Building Equitable Futures Strategy 2024–32*.

While bringing more women into construction is vital, they must also be safe and respected on site, which is why we have asked the regulator to monitor for trends that indicate patterns of gender discrimination through our complaints referral service. Other key initiatives include our free TAFE literacy, numeracy and digital support courses, the apprentice employee assistance program, the \$8 million Apprenticeships Innovation Fund and our Tradie Bootcamp, which will continue to support women through classroom and worksite experiences.

While we have heard the opposition standing up and claiming they want transparency around the decisions of the Labour Hire Authority, they have zero standing on this matter. The Liberals made it explicitly clear that they did not want the Labour Hire Authority to have new publication powers. Their own then Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations stated in this Parliament that they wanted to remove the provision allowing the Labour Hire Authority to publish details of someone it is considering exercising a power against. They wanted an unregulated system, and now they want to lecture us on the oversight. Where there is genuine wrongdoing, this government have shown that they will take decisive action. We have strongly supported the Commonwealth administration to do its work, and as of 31 March this year Taskforce Hawk has charged 22 people with 88 separate offences. We have significantly strengthened the powers of the Labour Hire Authority, which as of 13 May has cancelled 153 labour hire licences within the construction sector, implementing of course, complementary to that, a far more rigorous fit and proper person test for granting and renewing licences.

We have established a dedicated alliance to collaborate on tackling corruption. We have set up a brand new complaint referral service for anyone that has concerns about corrupt behaviour on government construction sites. We have strengthened Victoria's unlawful association scheme through the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024, which explicitly bans members of specified organised crime groups from entering Victorian government worksites. We have not stopped taking action and we will not stop doing the hard work to ensure our workplaces are safe and our institutions remain strong. I know in fact that we have many members of this side of the chamber that wish to make a contribution on this motion and lay forth our commitment to a strong integrity framework and continued protections in workplace safety. With that, I will leave my remarks there. I do look forward to other contributions from this side.

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (11:36): I rise to speak in support of this motion moved by Mrs Bev McArthur. We are in the midst of a deepening integrity crisis in this government. This motion is quite straightforward: \$15 billion is straightforward because \$15 billion cannot go missing, \$15 billion does not get up and walk on its own, and it is certainly not an administration error. It goes to the fundamental question of whether public money in Victoria has been spent in the public interest or whether Labor's Big Build has become a vehicle for corruption, criminal influence and the failure of oversight. For months now the Premier has resisted the calls from the coalition and IBAC itself to strengthen Victoria's anti-corruption powers, but in recent days the Premier Jacinta Allan has admitted that IBAC does not have the power it needs to do its job. This admission should come as alarming to every single Victorian. If what the Premier says is true, why has Labor waited so long to give IBAC the power it so clearly needs? We are told by the Premier that IBAC will receive follow-the-money powers, however, not until the end of 2027 – another 18 months down the track.

The Premier wants headlines today to appeal to voters, but the reality is that these reforms are delayed way beyond the next election. This is not accountability; this is political management. These powers are urgently needed by IBAC, which is extremely limited once public moneys move beyond direct government entities into unions, contractors, subcontractors and labour hire firms, yet this is precisely where corruption risks thrive – on major taxpayer-funded projects. Time and time again, Labor has

responded that the matter has been ‘referred to Victoria Police’, knowing fully well that Victoria Police is not equipped to investigate systematic public sector corruption. One would ask: why? Police play a vital role in keeping the community safe, but they cannot replace a properly empowered anti-corruption watchdog like IBAC. Corruption is not always purely on criminals. It often involves inflated costs, improper influence, job selling, questionable subcontract arrangements and public funding flowing through private networks. If IBAC cannot follow taxpayer money wherever it goes, corruption will unavoidably take hold. Let us consider the findings of the Watson report, which estimated that corrupt conduct has cost the Victorian taxpayer up to \$15 billion. That \$15 billion could have been invested in hospitals, ambulances, mental health services, schools, roads, police resources – and the list goes on. If that \$15 billion had been invested in those areas, we would not be in the situation we are in here in Victoria. To put it simply, \$15 billion could have funded the construction of around 10 new Footscray Hospitals in my electorate – that is deeply troubling to me.

There is the even more deeply troubling case of Women in Construction, as mentioned in this motion. This company secured a major Big Build contract under Labor’s gender equality policies, yet it has been linked to bikie gangs and individuals and serious criminal entities. It was reportedly founded by a convicted domestic violence offender and managed by a jailed drug trafficker now facing further family violence charges. If these reports are accurate, this represents not just a failure of paperwork by the government but also a failure to do due diligence by the government and a betrayal of every woman this policy was meant to support. In response to serious allegations involving bikies, organised crime, inflated costs and public money flowing through private entities, Labor’s answer when asked is, ‘Wait until the end of 2027’ – 18 months down the track. Now, this is simply not good enough. This is not leadership from the Premier.

So what does leadership look like? Leadership means publishing the findings of Operation Richmond. Leadership means immediately granting IBAC follow-the-money powers – not 18 months down the track. Leadership would mean admitting the Victorian integrity system has failed to keep pace with the scale of Labor’s infrastructure spending and making sure that every missing dollar is accounted for. In contrast the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew in the other house, has indicated a government led by her would take these decisive actions, pursuing every dollar lost to corruption, criminal influence and organised crime on government worksites. She would establish a royal commission into the CFMEU and also strengthen the IBAC follow-the-money rules and tackle organised crime through the introduction of tough new laws modelled on the United States racketeer-influenced and corrupt organisations framework. Mr Limbrick has mentioned organised crime on a regular basis. This is something we need to do, and this is how we need to go about it – by tackling and recovering the money through a joint taskforce, with Victoria Police, the federal police and the Australian Taxation Office investigating criminal activities, seizing assets linked to corruption on Big Build sites and returning those funds back to the victims.

We cannot let Labor continue to delay action on this issue. Victorians deserve accountability, they deserve transparency, and most importantly, they deserve a clear plan to restore integrity in government big builds and big projects – not the funnelling of millions and millions of dollars to criminal entities. Public money belongs to the public, not to corrupt operators. Victorians deserve to know whether the Big Build has been managed in their interests or whether it has allowed public funds to be funnelled to the wrong places. For these reasons, I support this motion.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:43): I rise to make a contribution to this debate on the state of the construction industry in Victoria. The construction industry is vital to the economic wellbeing of our state, and to see poor behaviour and bad actors in the industry has been deeply disappointing to many of us in this place. This case study clearly demonstrates the reasons why the Labor government’s recent decisive actions to give greater powers to the Labour Hire Authority and demand greater accountability for labour hire firms were so important. We of course welcome action taken by the Labour Hire Authority to investigate these deeply concerning allegations and await the outcomes of further investigations.

Gender inequality is a major driver of violence against women, and all women deserve to work free from harassment, discrimination and violence. That is why it is important that we have the Labour Hire Authority. But back in 2018 those opposite voted against it. I point to Mr Welch opposite, who has been shadow minister for industrial relations, and who has said clear as day that the Liberals would like to remove the provisions that allow the Labour Hire Authority to publish details of someone it is considering exercising a power against. We on this side know the importance of having a strong LHA and understand the critical role it plays in the industrial relations framework. Meanwhile, those opposite are still trying to catch up.

As already set out many times over, violence against women is unacceptable, and we have no tolerance for it. Last March we announced a \$5.5 million safe workplaces for women initiative supporting three innovative programs that support both employers and employees to address these issues by delivering advice, tools and training which work to help and strengthen community understanding of workplace rights and responsibilities. We on this side of the chamber want to see more women become involved in the construction industry, not fewer, and I would like to think that this is something that all of us on this side of the chamber would get behind and support. We want to support women in construction and encourage more people into this vital industry. Construction is a pivotal element of not just our economy but the economy in the world. It is crucial that we continue to reform and improve the sector, particularly as it relates to promoting women in the field. It would be completely inappropriate to use this as an opportunity to demonise, undermine and cut the wages of those construction workers who have been doing the right thing in the important work that they do building the homes and infrastructure that this state needs. This means developing stronger integrity and oversight systems which protect those workers and contractors who are doing the right thing.

One of the key measures recommended by the Wilson review we have implemented is the creation of Workforce Inspectorate Victoria as a new construction complaints referral service. This is a critical new service which will be able to receive complaints and reports of wrongdoing from those working in construction sites and ensure that they are forwarded to the appropriate regulator. Crucially, the construction complaints referral service has new legal powers to protect whistleblowers and ensure that workers who make reports are protected from violence, harassment, intimidation and reprisals. We have also implemented reforms which require contractors on public projects to report criminal behaviour as a contractual requirement, implementing another of the Wilson report's recommendations. Other integrity reforms include giving new powers to the Labour Hire Authority to strengthen the fit and proper person test and to demand documentation from labour hire businesses. Also important will be the ability to more strictly define where a business is considered to be providing labour hire licensing. These measures will improve accountability and integrity on construction sites. We have implemented these changes because accountability on construction sites means safer construction sites. Accountability on construction sites also means fairer construction sites. Further reforms as recommended by the Wilson report are planned for later down the line.

It is those of us on this side of the chamber who have actually acted to fix things and have set the construction industry on a better course. We note that the Integrity and Oversight Committee have undertaken detailed work on the complex integrity framework recently and have tabled a report to Parliament with recommendations for the government. Crucially, the government supports in principle recommendations to give IBAC follow-the-money powers. Both IBAC and the Integrity and Oversight Committee have recommended that these powers be legislated and given to the IBAC to empower IBAC to fight corruption in this state. In this way IBAC will now have the ability to protect public money which has been given to a private contractor.

Victoria's integrity framework is complex and interconnected, and amendments to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 are likely to have systemwide impacts affecting multiple agencies, including Victoria Police. The Allan Labor government is supporting a range of other recommendations in principle, totalling 21 recommendations accepted in principle, from the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report. Stronger investigation powers such as digital search

warrants also acknowledge the reality that we live in and give IBAC greater ability to conduct 21st-century investigations. These changes will come after an important and considered committee process which examines all various elements and implications of reform. The Allan Labor government is always committed to getting these things right, and that requires time and consideration, particularly as it relates to our important committee processes.

The Allan Labor government is also dedicated to promoting and supporting a vibrant construction industry free of violence and intimidation. We on this side of the chamber recognise that having a strong construction industry is critical to Victoria's future as a state which is growing rapidly. It is also critical to our great capital city Melbourne. This side of the chamber is ambitious for Victoria and ambitious for Melbourne. We recognise that for Melbourne to continue to be a great international city we need to build more homes and better infrastructure and take a 21st-century approach to city planning. If this means that we will face problems in the construction industry, the answer is not to strangle the industry, cut wages, put people out of work and stall our major projects; the answer is to respond accordingly and stamp out bad behaviour and support those who we need to help. It is for the government to take responsibility for setting things right, to put in the work to fix it and to get the construction industry back on track. When a particular firm is doing the wrong thing, there must be accountability and there must be action taken to restore integrity. That is exactly what we are doing. That is why we commissioned the formal review into Victorian government bodies' engagement with construction companies and construction unions. That is why we have done the work to implement the recommendations of the review, and that work is ongoing.

It is a strong commitment of the Allan Labor government to ensure that women have the same access to any field of work that they wish to pursue as any man does. This government has worked hard to ensure more women are training in construction than any other trade. We have legislated for guaranteed free TAFE, which recently hit another anniversary milestone. Over 60 per cent of the students benefiting from free TAFE are women. Over 108,000 women in Victoria have benefited from free TAFE. Then there is the *Building Equality Policy*, which has three main areas of focus: (1) to meet project-specific gender equality targets, (2) to engage more women across the sector as apprentices and trainees and (3) to implement the gender equality plans, which work to reduce skill shortages and promote gender equality. I hope my colleagues throughout this chamber can agree all of these goals are worthy. This policy mandates targets and gender equality action plans on government-funded projects over \$20 million to create training and employment opportunities for women. Having women involved in the construction sector is about more than ticking a check box; it is about letting young girls and women throughout Victoria dream and aspire to any career they wish to have. Greater diversity makes our workplace stronger. It helps fill skills shortages and gives our industries a more sustainable future. This is why the mandates and the affirmative policies are so important. Before the implementation of the policy only around 2.5 per cent of building and construction trades were women. This is not a sustainable situation, and this is not a desirable situation. Making the construction sector more accessible for women is primarily about giving women more choice about what sort of career they want to pursue.

We have a proven track record in Victoria of taking action where unacceptable behaviour arises, and we have a proven track record of supporting women in the construction sector. I am proud to be a part of the Allan Labor government, which is committed to supporting women, committed to supporting a strong and vibrant construction sector and committed to transparency.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:53): From the outset I just want to admit that this is a topic I am very sensitive about because it comes to the protection and the safety of women. I tell you what, when you have sat with families who have had their daughter brutally murdered with a dumbbell or their daughter brutally stabbed to death, you do not like to sit and listen to people like Mr Batchelor spit venom. Victoria is not a safe space for women – it is not. I stand here week after week and I share heartbreaking stories about women, about what they have been through, about what their families have been through, and the reality is that year after year – not week after week, not month after month but

year after year – they are being ignored. I want to mostly spend my time until question time addressing some of the things that I just think are completely outrageous in what we have heard from the government. Ms Watt said, ‘When there is a genuine wrongdoing, we will take decisive action.’ I want to know if this is a genuine wrongdoing. Shane Robertson killed Katie Haley with a dumbbell bar. The court heard she died from a blunt injury to the head. The judge said:

It is clear to me that you attacked your partner in uncontrollable rage and it was your intention to kill her ...

The judge said that the crime scene was described as ‘gruesome and horrific’. She received at least three blows to the face and died from a blow to the throat. I would say that that is a genuine wrongdoing. There has been no decisive action from this government; in fact in this particular case this man received 427 days off his sentence. I want to know if this is a genuine wrongdoing: Luay Sako stalked Celeste Manno relentlessly, broke into her home through her bedroom door and stabbed her, a 23-year-old girl, to death. Twenty-seven times he stabbed her. He used a hammer to break in. He stabbed her 23 times in 2½ minutes. Her cause of death was a stab to the heart. Justice Dixon said that it was done ‘with chilling efficiency’. He has no remorse for his actions. He will be eligible for parole in 2050, and he received 27 days off his sentence. To this day those recommendations that were given in order to respond to what I would call a genuine wrongdoing have not been implemented, and the fact that these people have got days off their sentences shows that this government is so hypocritical when it comes to protection of women. If it was true, what Ms Watt said – ‘When there is a genuine wrongdoing, we will take decisive action’ – I do not know what a genuine wrongdoing is.

I want to speak directly to point (2) and point (5) of this motion, which seem to have been overlooked. I admire Mr Berger; I think he is a fantastic guy. But when a motion comes like this and you talk about women accessing free TAFE, I think, ‘My gosh, it’s time that the government gets its head out of the clouds and begins to respond to what is actually going on in the state of Victoria.’ Mind you, I will say – I believe that is a genuine wrongdoing with Celeste Manno – since that report was handed down in 2022, every single year without fail the numbers of non-family violence stalking have increased. They are getting worse every year. I just find it, quite frankly, unbelievable. Point (2) talks about:

... the revelation that Women in Construction Pty Ltd, a labour hire company that won major Big Build work under Labor’s gender equity policy, was founded by a convicted domestic violence offender, managed by a jailed drug trafficker facing further charges ...

The facts about this are that a woman was locked in a small room while somebody smoked ice and she was beaten up – and you decide to talk about free TAFE. Completely missing the whole point of this motion is just unbelievable, and I think it says a lot about where you are putting your priorities. Another thing that happened: a woman was brutally assaulted – and this is so disgustingly ironic – by a health and safety officer on a government worksite. This is happening under your watch. Yes, do free TAFE and do those things that you believe in, but when a motion like this comes to the house, don’t you dare talk about it, because this goes to the safety of women. I have heard Premier Jacinta Allan say, ‘The safety of Victorians is my number one priority.’ I tell you what, you would not know it by listening to you lot. It is absolutely quite disgusting.

We will quickly go to the \$15 billion. That is not an abstract figure. That money that has been lost under your watch to corruption could have paid to implement the 45 recommendations from the stalking reform. I see Ms Shing having a laugh there, but it could have paid for that. It could have paid for the \$20 million – plus more, with a whole heap of change – for the crime prevention programs that your government has cut. It could pay for kids to actually learn how to read using the science of learning and a phonics-based approach. It could fund that – the number one protective factor that stops people getting involved in criminal activity. It could have paid for rehab, it could have supported victims and their families and it could have gone to early intervention programs. I will finish by saying this: I do not understand why, when there is such darkness going on and while there is such pain going on, you would not want to shine a light on them. I commend the motion to the house.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Game hunting**

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:00): (1333) My question is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. Congratulations, and welcome to the portfolio and the war between me and AJP. With the establishment of Outdoor Recreation Victoria and its expanded focus on participation and regional economic development, what is the government doing to better leverage Victoria's globally unique free-ranging hog deer population to grow international hunter tourism and deliver economic benefits for regional communities?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:00): I thank Mr Bourman for his strong advocacy for recreational hunting, an important recreation that thousands of Victorians take part in. Victoria's hog deer population is an internationally unique resource, and in fact Victoria is one of the few places in the world where wild hog deer can be legally hunted, making it highly sought after for experienced hunters from across the country. In fact people come internationally to Victoria for this.

**Nick McGowan** interjected.

**Enver ERDOGAN**: Our government recognises that well-managed hunting can deliver multiple benefits. It plays an important role in wildlife management. I know, Mr McGowan, you might not necessarily agree with it, but it does play an important role. It also generates significant economic activity for regional communities through visitor spending on accommodation, hospitality, fuel, equipment, transport and guiding services – a whole range of economic activity that it creates across our state. The annual hog deer season attracts hunters to Gippsland and other regional areas, providing an important boost to local businesses and supporting jobs in communities that rely on nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation.

Our existing regulatory framework is set up to allow this to occur, and I think Outdoor Recreation Victoria's creation will amplify those opportunities for people to get outdoors and enjoy the outdoors and our nature. Our government recognises the unique value of Victoria's hog deer resource and the important contribution it makes to regional economies, and we will continue to work with stakeholders and consider opportunities to maximise the economic and tourism benefits associated with hog deer hunting in our state. As the minister, I am committed to strengthening our reputation as a premier destination for outdoor recreation and sustainable hunting.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:02): I thank the minister for his answer. Minister, Victoria already has a significant game-hunting sector supporting regional jobs and spending. When will the government release updated economic data or reporting on the contribution game hunting already makes to Victoria's economy so that future opportunities can be properly measured?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:02): I thank Mr Bourman for his supplementary question. We all know that game hunting makes a significant contribution to Victoria's economy, supporting thousands of Victorians. There is a 2020 report on the economic contribution of recreational hunting, which finds that an estimated 69 per cent of the expenditure occurs in regional Victoria. I can confirm to the chamber that important work is being undertaken by DJSIR to get an update on the development of a report that will provide insights into sector's contribution to gross state product as well as the number of jobs it supports across our state. The report is currently being finalised, so wait for it, and I look forward to receiving the report and considering its findings.

**Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:03): (1334) My question is to the Special Minister of State. Minister, while your government delays stronger IBAC powers until 2028, IBAC's Operation Richmond report into the Andrews government's dealings with the United Firefighters Union has been

blocked from release by court action. Doesn't this prove IBAC is already crippled by weak powers and Labor interference?

**The PRESIDENT:** I think that is asking for an opinion, but I will leave the minister to answer as she sees fit.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:04): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question, which contained a number of assertions that were interesting, to say the least. I want to correct the record on a couple of them straight off the bat. First of all, you are wrong, Mrs McArthur: the government provided a comprehensive response to the IOC's report into the powers of IBAC in the Parliament yesterday. If you take the time to look at that response, you will see that we have stepped out very clearly which recommendations we will be supporting in principle and have immediately sought to set up a process to come up with the reforms necessary to give effect to those recommendations.

**Bev McArthur:** In 2028.

**Ingrid STITT:** No, wrong. The expert reference group: if you have read the media release, let alone the government response, you will –

*Members interjecting.*

**Ingrid STITT:** On a point of order, President, I am having trouble hearing myself.

**The PRESIDENT:** I call the house to order. The minister to continue without any yelling at her.

**Ingrid STITT:** As I was in the process of explaining to those opposite, the media release, if you cannot be bothered to read the full government response, clearly articulates that the expert reference group made up of those integrity agencies in my department will report to me in May next year, and then the government will bring legislation to the Parliament. I also want to take up the element of your question – because there are a couple of different questions in your question – around individual investigations of IBAC. Those opposite purporting to understand the integrity framework and the powers that IBAC operate under should know that IBAC is accountable to the Parliament. They do not provide reports directly to any minister in the government. They are, quite appropriately, independent and at arm's length from government. If and when they provide special reports to the Parliament is a matter entirely for IBAC.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:06): This report concerns the conduct of this Labor government – your Labor government. It has been completed and it is ready for publication, and it continues to be suppressed from public scrutiny less than six months before an election. Minister, will you rule out that any person connected to the current government has any involvement in the proceedings seeking to block its release?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:07): Mrs McArthur, as the Leader of the Opposition in this place, you ought to get some better advice about the way in which IBAC operates and its powers and responsibilities. The fact is that matters to do with ongoing investigations are clearly spelt out in a number of different parts of the act and are not matters that are briefed to any minister of the Crown. In fact it would be highly inappropriate for that to occur. So if you have questions about that investigation and matters before the court, there is absolutely no sense in you putting them to me as Special Minister of State. You ought to put them to IBAC.

**Ministers statements: Horseshoe Bend community garden**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:08): Today I rise to inform the house

about the Allan Labor government's investment in the Horseshoe Bend community garden in Keilor. Through the 2026–27 Victorian budget we are investing \$93,000 in the community garden through the better parks and public outdoors program. This funding will reactivate the site and support public education, community groups and activities that make it so special. The Horseshoe Bend Community Group started this garden in 2021 with a \$50,000 grant through Parks Victoria's Volunteering Innovation Fund. What began as a vision has grown into a thriving, much-loved asset for Melbourne's west. Horseshoe Bend is part of Brimbank Park, for those that might not understand or know about Melbourne's west. It is a much-valued place, a vital public space with a children's playground, public barbecue areas and walking and cycling paths.

In urban areas across Melbourne access to green space is not optional. It is essential for mental health, for community and for our connection to nature. This investment strengthens the link between our environment and our wellbeing. I want to take this opportunity to thank our Deputy Premier and member for Niddrie Ben Carroll for his strong advocacy for Horseshoe Bend and for his work with the community group. I also want to thank Parks Victoria for their partnership with the community group. But most of all I want to recognise the volunteers of the Horseshoe Bend Community Group, particularly president Cynthia Frain and vice-president Marg O'Neill. Communities are built by people who give their time and their passion, and this garden is a testament to such incredible people. Our latest investment ensures Horseshoe Bend community garden will remain a priceless community asset for decades to come. Only Labor backs the volunteers and community spaces that Victorians rely on.

#### **Illicit tobacco**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:10): (1335) My question is to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and it is a very simple question. How many tobacconists have been shut down since the introduction of the new tobacco licensing regime?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:10): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question about our new licensing scheme, the first ever tobacco licensing scheme in the state's history, backed by a \$59 million investment in last year's budget and this year's budget. So I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Treasurer for the additional investment and the additional inspectors we will be having on the beat. In relation to the closure powers, Mr Limbrick, I think you are pre-empting some of the debate in this chamber, as there is legislation on foot to bring to fruition the closure powers I promised earlier this year. They will be introduced shortly and will be debated in this chamber in the coming sitting weeks. Those powers will be in place so that landlords will be given powers to terminate leases where illegal tobacco is being sold, so we are empowering landlords, and we are also going to take tough penalties for landlords who knowingly allow –

**David Ettershank**: On a point of order, President, the minister has been asked a very simple question, and I could not hear an answer. If we could just have a little more quiet.

**The PRESIDENT**: I will uphold the point of order, not just for the members that want to hear the answer but the member that asked the question would probably like to hear the answer as well, so if we show everyone that respect that would be great.

**Enver ERDOGAN**: Thank you, President. I was being very relevant to the question. Mr Limbrick asked about closures of tobacco stores, and I think closure powers are coming into place shortly through legislation being introduced in the other place by Mr Edbrooke and will be debated in this chamber shortly. So those powers are coming into place.

In the meantime we are making, obviously, inspections. We are seizing products. About 4.5 million cigarette sticks alone have been seized since the regulator started enforcing our licensing scheme in February of this year. I can say that Victoria Police has issued over 350 search warrants, so this work has been continuing over a number of years. Over 200 offenders have been brought to justice and \$50 million in illegal products have been taken off our streets by Victoria Police, and we will continue

to do that work. But of course the legislation relating to closure powers will be introduced very shortly in the other place and then come to this place over the coming sitting weeks.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:12): I thank the minister for his answer. My supplementary question is that there were recent media reports stating that illegal tobacco shops were being pressured by organised crime into also selling illegal alcohol. What is the minister's department doing about this?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:13): I thank Mr Limbrick for these supplementary questions. These questions are really important to our state. We know that there are organised crime syndicates taking advantage of, I guess, the price differentials between legal and illicit products, whether that be tobacco or whether that be alcohol. Victoria Police has a taskforce that is focused on that work and supporting the industries affected, especially liquor retailers but also the world-class hospitality sector of our state that has been greatly affected. But I think questions about the operations and illegal behaviour – criminal behaviour – should be addressed to the Minister for Police in the other place.

### Construction industry

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:13): (1336) My question is for the Minister for Industrial Relations. Minister, ACCIONA chief executive Bede Noonan has identified the CFMEU's monopoly over –

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Sorry, Mr Mulholland, the minister did not hear the start of your question, so I think it is easier if you just start from the start.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** My question is, again, to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Minister, ACCIONA chief executive Bede Noonan has identified the CFMEU's monopoly over government civil project sites as the root cause of corruption and criminality on Big Build sites. Isn't it a fact that this government-enabled monopoly is the root cause of corruption on construction sites?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:15): Mr Mulholland, that is an attempt to ask me a question in a convoluted way to fit it within my portfolio, but I think it will give me the opportunity to again come back to the work that I have provided updates to the chamber about before, particularly in relation to the Wilson review. Recently we completed the introduction of many of the recommendations. The fit and proper person test for labour hire companies came into force just this week, for example. The Wilson recommendations have been implemented, which were all in response to concerns about inappropriate conduct on government worksites, whether it was involving the CFMEU or any other labour hire companies and the like, so everything was in remit in relation to government sites. The recommendations that have been implemented are setting up the complaints function specifically for concerns around corruption or misconduct on sites, and that is within the workforce inspectorate. We have established the alliance of state and federal industrial and law enforcement agencies, which is an opportunity to share intelligence, share experience and share advice, which can then indeed inform action, particularly whether Victoria Police should act and whether labour hire has a further role to act and indeed has the ability to, again, continue to inform government on anything that it would like. We have introduced reforms to, as I said, the labour hire scheme. We have talked, I think, in lots of contributions from members in relation to the motion that you had earlier, highlighting some of the work that they are doing. Importantly, there are contractual obligations on government contractors to report any suspected criminal or unlawful conduct –

**Harriet Shing:** Including ACCIONA.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Which is where I am getting to, Ms Shing, thank you – for the ability and in fact the obligation for government contractors to report any suspected criminal or unlawful conduct to the new corruption complaints referral service. Whether it is an individual that you have named or whether it is anybody else who has a contractual obligation, it is now expected that that information would be passed on so it can be acted on. Mr Mulholland, further, when it comes to addressing the CFMEU, the federal government appointed an administrator who has really taken strong action in that regard. A lot of work has been done in relation to dealing with that union, which is, as is appropriate, the responsibility of the federal government.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:17): Minister, Mr Noonan further states that workers on Big Build sites have lost the freedom to join a non-CFMEU union or not to be a union member at all, and this remains the case even under the CFMEU’s government-appointed administrators that you just spoke about. What specific steps, if any, has the minister taken to restore freedom of association for workers on publicly funded worksites?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:18): Indeed you are providing some levels of detail in relation to statements that have been made by Mr Noonan, and I think it is probably worthwhile ensuring we put further statements on the record, because they provide fuller context than the way that you have sought to convey your question. Mr Noonan also said that the joint venture was on track to start tunnelling work from September:

Although high oil prices would increase the cost of concrete used in the tunnels, he said it was “not huge” ...

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, on relevance, the question went to what specific steps, if any, the minister has taken to restore freedom of association on publicly funded worksites.

**The PRESIDENT:** I was a bit concerned with the actual substantive question – and I know we have had this before – asking a minister to comment on someone’s comment, which is difficult. But I will call the minister to the question.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Mr Mulholland, you made reference to costs, and I think it is just important to ensure that there is comprehensive information on the record. ACCIONA’s chief executive also said that taxpayers could get essential infrastructure built for less if government streamlined planning, design and approval processes, which he argues are the overwhelming cause of cost blowouts. In relation to the union coverage, DMARC and the like, I have had ongoing correspondence with Mr Furlong at the Fair Work Commission in relation to these matters, because it is a federal responsibility.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:20): I move:

That the minister’s response be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ministers statements: Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund**

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:20): I would like to update the house about how the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund one year on is providing increased funding for our emergency services agencies. Home owners are actually now aware that there was a lot of information around, particularly when the fund started. They now know that their bill did not double. They know that farmers are not paying more, and they are seeing SES and CFA trucks rolling out right across the state. I can confirm that for the coming financial year I have made no changes to the variable rate on properties across Victoria. This means that the rates are the same as last year. I have also lifted the rebate cap on primary production land value from \$5 million to \$10 million. Under the ESVF farmers who are also eligible volunteers continue to receive a tax cut, paying nothing or less compared to the old system.

As I outlined in the committee for Mr McGowan last night, I have the opportunity to provide some information to the chamber in relation to base funding.

**Nick McGowan:** On a point of order, President, I know it is somewhat difficult to make a point of order on a ministers statement, but nonetheless, in respect to misleading this house, it is physically impossible for that fund to have actually funded any of the new appliances.

*Members interjecting.*

**Nick McGowan:** It is important because it relates to whether this house has been misled, regardless of the format that that has taken. It is physically impossible for that tax to actually have delivered a single appliance since the institution of that tax.

**The PRESIDENT:** It is not a point of order. As far as ministers statements are concerned, the standing orders say the minister may make a statement, and that is about it.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** As I outlined last night, the CFA's baseline funding from the ESVF will be boosted by \$46 million this year. SES's is increasing by \$29 million, taking its budget to over \$100 million for the first time.

**Wendy Lovell:** On a point of order, President, in the words of Shannon Deery, I think the Treasurer's pants may be on fire.

**The PRESIDENT:** Ms Lovell, hopefully it will not happen again, but because of the good work you do as Deputy President I will give you leeway and not send you on an early lunch. But that was very close.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** This is exactly what I expect from those opposite. When we have evidence of baseline funding increases of \$46 million for the CFA, \$29 million for SES and \$68 million increases to FRV, just wait for the scare campaign and the misinformation that somehow that is a cut. Go and spin that, Ms Lovell, into the millions of dollars apparently – despite the fact that I might need someone to extinguish my pants accordingly. There will be increased funding, and I wait to see how you will interpret that and mislead your communities in a shameful manner.

The government of course provides much more funding than is provided under the ESVF. This year there is \$2.4 billion – far above what is collected by the ESVF – that will go to emergency services. But we know what those opposite will do. They will cut the ESVF – *(Time expired)*

#### **Data centres**

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:24): (1337) My question is to the Minister for Environment. The Australian Energy Market Operator predicts that the growth in data centres across Victoria and New South Wales will require an extra 4 gigawatts of gas-powered generation annually to manage increased demand, and a Greenpeace Australia Pacific report confirms that if a quarter of the new data centres were powered by gas, it would almost triple the amount of carbon emissions compared to grid power. With news of a 350-hectare megahub planned for the west 'so big it will need its own gas turbines to avoid tripping the power grid' and needing more power than the total capacity of Loy Yang A, I ask: how does the government intend to reconcile Victoria's carbon emission reduction targets with this explosion of data centres?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:25): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question, but I think the question is better directed to the minister for energy and climate action under the standing orders. The minister could refer it on, but I think that is the appropriate minister. He asked a question about energy. If it was about the environment, I would be happy to answer it.

**The PRESIDENT:** As I have said a number of times in this chamber, members have the right to ask any minister a question. The minister has the right to say that that does not fall within their portfolio

and suggest it could be directed to another portfolio. It is either the minister's answer, or Mr Ettershank can refer it to the minister for energy and climate change, to be passed on, if he wants.

**David ETTERS HANK:** I think that was 'sting like a butterfly, dodge like a bee'. I am happy just to leave the question on the record and move to my supplementary, if I may.

**The PRESIDENT:** You would like to do a supplementary? I would say it would be very difficult. The supplementary has to be relevant to the answer, and it is going to be very difficult to do a supplementary when the minister says it is not within his remit.

**David ETTERS HANK:** Thank you, President; I am happy to be guided by your wisdom on the appropriateness or otherwise.

Beyond exorbitant carbon emissions and water consumption, another environmental impact of data centres is the vast amount of e-waste they generate. GPUs and servers used in data centres are replaced on average every two to five years. Infrastructure Victoria has noted that the state's e-waste recycling capacity is already under pressure and e-waste is growing at a rate three times faster than that of the general waste stream, putting the state on track to generate more than 250,000 tonnes of e-waste by 2030. Can the minister explain how the data centre sustainability action plan addresses the mountain of e-waste generated by the state's data centres and how it fits with the government's circular economy goals? Or, in the absence of such a plan, what is the government doing?

**The PRESIDENT:** The issue is that I do not think it was relevant to the substantive, to which the minister's answer was that it was better directed to another minister.

**Ingrid Stitt:** On a point of order, President, the supplementary question was actually a matter that sits within Minister Dimopoulos's responsibilities as the minister responsible for that strategy.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:28): I move:

That the minister's response be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Camping regulation**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:29): (1338) My question is to the Minister for Environment, Minister, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action is issuing infringement notices to Victorians camping in state forests, including around the Grampians. Why is the government fining Victorians who are undertaking lawful recreational activity?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:29): I thank Ms Bath for her question and her interest in my environmental portfolio and her questions about really detailed operational matters of the department. What I will say is that our department is committed to ensuring that people can enjoy the outdoors but also making sure that they do it in a responsible, secure and legal way. Where there are infringement notices, if you have specific examples, I am happy for you to forward them to my office and to follow up if you believe there has been some injustice. But in that regard, we make no apologies for enforcing the laws and regulations that are required to ensure that everyone can safely and responsibly enjoy our outdoors.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:30): Thank you, Minister, for your response. I did say 'lawful' recreational activity that they were being fined for. Minister, is the increase in infringement activity linked to the government's failure to reach a wage agreement with the union representing park rangers and public sector staff, and is the purpose of these fines to reduce demand on public facilities that are no longer being fully maintained?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:31): I reject the premise of Ms Bath's

supplementary question. It is an extraordinary allegation. Unfortunately, Ms Bath, there is a pattern developing here of misinformation, where you are misleading the community in relation to some decisions and actions of the department. What I will say is that in relation to those negotiations, the department in good faith is negotiating with its workforce, and they will work through that. But it has no relation to the allegation you have just put, which has no basis to it. So I completely reject the premise of Ms Bath's question.

**Ministers statements: Centre of Excellence in Paramedicine**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:31): Backing our paramedics means backing them at every single stage of their career, from world-class training through to supporting them on the front line. This week, I was joined by the member for St Albans, Minister Suleyman, to see Victoria's world-first Centre of Excellence in Paramedicine take shape in the heart of Melbourne's west. That is a project that will be complete later this year, with a \$10 million investment from the Allan Labor government. Delivered in partnership with Victoria University, our Australian-first facility will provide cutting-edge simulation and training environments for future and current paramedics. For students like Tori, Riley and Bonnie, it means more hands-on, real-world experience that builds on the skills and confidence needed from day one on the job. Thanks in particular to Tori for being part of the design and development stage as a graduate in paramedicine. Her input has been invaluable.

When it opens later this year, the centre will support around 1500 students annually and help train the next generation of paramedics right here in Victoria. Backing our paramedics also means investing in initiatives that help them to get back on the road sooner, and that is why we have increased our on-road workforce by more than 50 per cent and invested a record \$2 billion into ambulance services. This year's budget invests a further \$50.7 million to improve secondary triage, strengthen call taking and dispatch and deliver innovative solutions to get paramedics back on the road faster.

We are continuing to invest in initiatives that connect Victorians with the right care while avoiding a trip to the emergency department – taking pressure off our ambulance services, expanding the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department and delivering urgent care clinics and the nurse-on-call service. We are also introducing standards for timely emergency and ambulance care, and only Labor backs our hardworking ambulance paramedics. While the Liberal Party is working out which of these programs they will cut to fill their \$40 billion budget black hole, we will continue to invest in those initiatives that work for paramedics and continue to save lives.

**Health system**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:33): (1339) My question today is to the Minister for Health. A new Department of Health blueprint has flagged the use of AI to identify urgent cases and overhaul outpatient systems, but there has been little detail publicly about how the technology would work, what patient safeguards would be in place or how sensitive health data would be protected. Minister, where is this process up to, and what assurances can you provide the chamber that health information and private patient data will be protected?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:34): Thank you very much, Mr Puglielli, for that question. What this question does is a really important thing in a number of ways. It identifies the intersection between the way in which we use and deploy technology on the one hand and the very human elements of providing care to people in need on the other. This is where the blueprint provides a really wonderful way for us to better understand the intersection between technology and virtual care on the one hand, with improved efficiencies, particularly in administrative systems, and making sure that when and as we allocate resources, we are putting them in the areas where they can make the most difference.

This is also where we want to make sure that we are seeking the guidance of technology whilst also having that operate as a shadow system so that it operates alongside those human systems that already

operate to ensure that we understand in the first instance what those improvements look like and that we can develop and incorporate continuous improvement in administrative systems in the way in which options and pathways are identified for care, the way in which we can understand where and how our resources are moving around an incredibly complex system and the way in which we can add to that without detracting from or diminishing the work that people are doing within the system. Whether that is about the movement to electronic medical records and making sure that we can automate the use of technology in that space right through to working with the way in which resources are allocated for the purpose of triage, we know that tech can make a really big difference. We will continue to roll out those reforms as part of the blueprint, but that, Mr Puglielli, is actually an ongoing process. This is something for which we have developed a blueprint in really careful consultation with industry and with workers in the sector to deliver, and we will make sure that we also continue to make sure that as that work on AI continues we have the relevant safeguards in place.

This is something that is happening globally. We know that AI is in a really strong position to be able to assist in the implementation and delivery of strategies and blueprints and reforms that are incentivising better human outcomes. Again, it is ongoing work. Digital solutions are a really important part of the way in which we deliver health. The virtual emergency department, for example, is receiving about a thousand calls a day, and it sits alongside the work that we are doing, whether with telehealth or with in-person presentations to the emergency departments. The virtual clinics that we have got, the virtual women's clinics that we have got, the work in community health – it is a spectrum of options. The more we do to provide people with better options, including through the deployment of technology, the better our patient outcomes, the better chance we have to be able to provide people with care closer to home or indeed in their homes and the better clinical outcomes we have as well. There are really robust protections for the work and privacy associated with patient data, and we will continue to work alongside the safeguards that operate now to make sure that they continue and are strengthened over time.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:37): Thank you, Minister, for the response. Minister, will you rule out contracting Palantir Technologies to undertake this work?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:37): Mr Puglielli, the Department of Health is putting up guidance shortly in relation to how new and emerging technology can assist with the delivery of better systems that are geared entirely toward an end result of better patient care and safer patient care as well. That will be something that is subject to a procurement process. Ministers, for very good reasons, do not make those procurement decisions. That is something which, again, I will not comment on, as it relates to a process that absolutely and appropriately needs to sit independently of the work that this portfolio does.

### Health system

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): (1340) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, Graeme has a prolapsed bowel and irritable bowel syndrome. He needs colorectal surgery and has been assessed as a category 2 patient with a clinically recommended time for treatment of 90 days. He was placed on the waitlist on June 11, 2025 – a year ago. Graeme cannot leave the house, cannot go shopping and cannot go on a holiday. He cannot watch his grandchildren play sport. He needs to be near a toilet because he has no control over his bowels. His mental health is deteriorating, as is his quality of life. Graeme is just one of the 68,000 Victorians waiting for vital surgery, 8000 more than a year ago. Why is the health system failing to meet the demand for surgery, leaving thousands of people with their life on hold and their quality of life deteriorating?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:39): Thank you, Ms Crozier, for that question. I am not aware of Graeme's circumstances beyond what you have just put onto the record in question time. As I have said to you on a number of occasions now, if there are individual matters that you would like to discuss and raise with my office, please do so. In the event that there is assistance that can be provided by way of further

information, then we will do that, subject of course to privacy and to patient confidentiality considerations that, as you well know, apply in the consideration of these matters. To that end, Ms Crozier, the remarks that I am about to make do not relate to Graeme or to his situation. I am therefore going to go directly to the question that you have put around the quarter 3 data. So far, Ms Crozier, we have delivered more than 160,000 planned surgeries, and we are on track to deliver 210,000 surgeries. It is 5655 more surgeries in fact than the same time last financial year. In Q3, planned surgery activity was lower than the last time last year, with 49,732 surgeries delivered and the waitlist increasing to 68,116. As I indicated in recent hearings, Ms Crozier, that I think you were in attendance for, this reflects a combination of things – population growth and changes to the demographic.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Harriet SHING:** Well, you can scoff all you want, Ms Crozier. I just want to be really clear. The things that we are doing are having an impact in managing the waitlist, but the waitlist itself applies from the moment that somebody gets a referral. They are on a waitlist from day one right through to the moment that the surgery occurs. We are meeting 100 per cent of category 1 surgeries within time. And you can look at the fact that this is the only jurisdiction on the eastern seaboard to be doing this.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, I have been listening to the minister's response, and she has not addressed my question. I ask her to come back to it. Why is the system failing to meet the demand for surgery – like with Graeme, who is watching the minister answer this question, whose life is on hold, whose life is deteriorating? He is one of the 68,000 she has referred to, and I would ask you to bring her back to the specifics of the question I asked.

**The PRESIDENT:** I believe the minister has been relevant to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** Ms Crozier, as I have said, please get in touch and we will have a conversation about an individual matter. I am not going to get to my feet today and talk to that.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Harriet SHING:** In New South Wales the waitlist is 92,000, and when we are talking about Victoria and a comparative figure of 68,000, we know that the things that we are doing are having an impact because we are providing a range of options for care, whether that is the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department, whether that is secondary triage, Hospital in the Home, the virtual clinics, the community health centres, Chemist Care Now and the work on the women's clinic and mobile services. This is the work that requires a unified health system, Ms Crozier. Under you, you are just going to close, shut and privatise because you do not care about patients. You never have.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): Minister, you are extraordinary. I think Graeme will be incredibly disappointed with your response, given the conversation I have had with him where he has been almost to tears about his situation. If you do not understand what I have just put into this house, you are failing every single Victorian. My question is: can you guarantee that no Victorian patient will die as a consequence of their condition deteriorating because they are waiting too long for treatment?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Health, Minister for Water) (12:43): To Graeme, who is watching this question – and I am not sure whether Graeme is in the gallery or whether Graeme is watching this feed – please contact my office, and we will provide you with assistance in understanding, as we should, what it is that you are experiencing so that we can provide you with that direct assistance by reference to your own patient privacy and the confidentiality requirements that apply to you under the patient records legislation. Ms Crozier, you should know better by now than to seek to create an opportunity for performance in this place when it relates to ongoing work to protect Victorians and save lives. All you do is close hospitals. All you do is go to war with workers.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, you and the minister know that this is not a chance to attack the opposition and debate. I am asking a very legitimate question here. I have explained the situation. I ask again: can the minister guarantee that no Victorian will die while they are waiting for surgery, as their life is deteriorating?

**The PRESIDENT:** I am racking my brain on previous rulings that were directly about a member seeking a guarantee from a minister and on rulings around the expectations. I will follow that up – I am just flagging that to the house – but I call the minister to the question.

**Harriet SHING:** Thanks, Ms Crozier. I just got a question from Mr Puglielli about protecting patient records, and I think you would be horrified if you got a question in this place about your own medical records. I will work alongside Graeme. Graeme, please get in touch with my office, and we will assist.

### **Ministers statements: naloxone dispensing machines**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Government Services, Special Minister of State, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria) (12:45): Last week Victoria took another important step forward in helping prevent overdose deaths with the launch of Australia’s first naloxone-dispensing machine. I was joined by my colleagues in this place Mr Berger and Mr Batchelor and our colleague from the other place the member for Albert Park Nina Taylor MP in launching the machine at the Alfred hospital. It is one of 20 to be rolled out across Victoria. These machines will provide free naloxone 24 hours a day, seven days a week, helping put life-saving medication into more homes, handbags, glove boxes and communities across Victoria.

Naloxone can temporarily reverse an overdose and give someone critical time while emergency services are on the way. It saves lives, and the reason we are doing this is clear: too many Victorians are dying from preventable overdose. Heroin accounted for more than half of those deaths, while pharmaceutical opioids like oxycodone and fentanyl were involved in more than a third. And we are seeing more potent synthetic opioids appearing in substances like cocaine, ketamine and MDMA. That is why the machines are so important. They are breaking down barriers to access to make sure that Victorians have the tools they need to respond quickly in an emergency. Just since Friday 60 units have been dispensed at the Alfred machine, with 60 per cent of these transactions occurring outside of business hours and more than 30 people indicating it was their first time accessing naloxone.

Our government has proudly taken a harm reduction approach to drug harm, and I want to acknowledge the frontline workers who support Victorians every day with compassion and dignity, including Megan McKechnie, Christopher Darwin and the whole team at the Alfred. This trial is another important step forward to providing practical evidence-based action to save lives.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:48): (2350) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. The Allan Labor government announced the best midday power offer in the country, the midday power saver. This fantastic initiative will give Victorians who opt in 3 hours of free electricity every day between 11 am and 2 pm from 1 October, allowing them to take advantage of our abundant solar energy right when it is at its peak. This is a huge win for households across the Northern Metropolitan Region, giving families a practical way to slash their electricity costs simply by shifting energy usage, like running the washing machine or the dishwasher in the middle of the day, and you can use those timer features on the appliances to do that. I recently had the pleasure of visiting a wonderful constituent in Brunswick, alongside the minister, and we had a great discussion about exactly how these initiatives positively impact everyday households. While the midday power saver is an important step towards pushing down power bills for everyday Victorians, my question is:

in what other ways is the Allan Labor government helping support families in the Northern Metropolitan Region to save money on their power?

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:49): (2351) My constituency question is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts. Recently I met with the Port Melbourne and Fishermans Bend sports clubs alliance, representing 11 sports clubs across seven codes at JL Murphy Reserve in Port Melbourne. They are concerned that while thousands of new residents are moving into Fishermans Bend, planning, particularly for sporting infrastructure, is being left behind. Existing clubs are at capacity, kids are being turned away and facilities are failing. There is great uncertainty about future sporting fields, courts, pavilions and open space. The alliance is seeking a comprehensive master plan to ensure one of Australia's largest urban renewal projects continues to grow as a complete community, not simply as a collection of apartments. Will the minister expedite a master plan for Fishermans Bend, including JL Murphy Reserve, and provide a timeline for its completion?

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:50): (2352) My question today is for the Minister for Regional Development. My constituents ask: will the minister allocate the \$1.6 million for infrastructure needed to progress a housing development at the former primary school site in Hopetoun? I recently met with the Yarriambiack Shire Council to discuss the desperate need for infrastructure upgrades to progress housing projects for the town of Hopetoun, along with other local issues. The councillors and CEO presented me with an incredibly well laid-out plan and business case for many projects they hope to see to fruition. The old school site at Hopetoun is a prime example of these well-laid-out plans. All Yarriambiack shire needs is a little help from the government to lay the ground infrastructure, such as sewerage, water, power, telecommunications, earthworks, roads and drainage works. This development has the potential to create 20 new homes in this small town, which will encourage professionals such as doctors and teachers to move to and stay in the community. Right now, I am told, there are absolutely no permanent properties available in Hopetoun. Doctors and teachers and other professionals they hope to attract to the area have – *(Time expired)*

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (2353) My question today is to the Minister for Community Sport. How is the Allan Labor government investing in infrastructure to increase the usage of community sport facilities in the Southern Metropolitan Region? I recently had the pleasure of going down to Elsternwick Park to celebrate and officially open the new lights and the upgrades to the pavilion that were recently completed thanks to a \$1 million contribution from the Victorian government. Elsternwick Park is a thriving hub for community sport in the area, home to the Old Melburnians Football Club and the Elsternwick Cricket Club. The new lighting in particular is massively increasing the usage of the park for clubs to play and train at night, and obviously as we go into winter, things get darker and it is much more important to have better light at these facilities to increase their usage. Sport is the beating heart of many communities, and clearly Elsternwick is absolutely benefiting from the investments that Labor is making to improve participation in community sport.

#### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (2354) It is a privilege to advance my constituency question today for the Minister for Disability Lizzie Blandthorn. Normally the minister would be in the chamber, but unfortunately she is not here today. I will make sure she gets a copy of this. This is a copy of an email from one of my local constituents: Jackie, we will say, but we will actually alter her name for the public record. Nonetheless Jackie sent an email to the minister on 21 May. It is an excellent email. Jackie is the mum of a beautiful young boy who is now growing up to be a man. He was at primary school, and he has an ability constraint: he uses a wheelchair to get

around. She has, as a mother, written to the minister and asked that we take a look at the accessible parking permit scheme and look at states like Queensland, where they allow more than one accessible car parking permit. This is critical for families and could absolutely revolutionise the lives of thousands of children and families with those children and adults with disabilities.

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (2355) My question is for the Minister for Health. From the 1960s until 2019 thousands of human remains at Castlemaine Cemetery were dug up and dumped in bushland while plots were resold to other families. Historical letters, police investigations and Department of Health warnings show that authorities repeatedly instructed the cemetery trust to stop the unlawful practice, including after a human skull was discovered in 1994. When cemetery manager Deb Tranter took over in 2020, she ceased the practice immediately and sought advice from the department on how to respectfully handle the remains. She was told to apply for a grant, hire an excavator and rebury any bones found. Given the department oversees compliance for 490 cemeteries across Victoria, with most run by volunteers like Deb, can the minister please explain why repeated warnings were ignored for decades and whether, as the new minister, she will implement procedures to ensure this never happens again?

#### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (2356) My question is for the Minister for Cost of Living. Across Melbourne's south-east many households rely on their vehicles each day to travel to work, attend school and stay connected with their local communities, so with cost-of-living pressures continuing to affect families in my region, practical measures that help to reduce everyday expenses can make a real difference. The Allan Labor government is providing support to Victorian motorists through the 20 per cent vehicle registration rebate. Minister, how will these Labor government registration relief rebate measures help my constituents to ensure that their cost of living is kept front and centre and that they are getting the best value?

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (2357) My question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services. Wodonga's Hume Patient Transport provides critical non-emergency patient transport services for Albury Wodonga Health, the TAC, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and private hospitals across the north-east of Victoria. Despite being approved as high-acuity medical transport and having an impeccable claims record, this family-run business has been refused insurance on its vehicles. Will the minister urgently intervene and work with the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority to provide an insurance solution for Hume Patient Transport? Insurance has never previously been an issue, but to date more than 30 insurers and brokers have declined cover. As a result, its fleet has been grounded. Over the weekend alone, the company was forced to turn away 12 transport requests from Albury Wodonga Health, worsening bed blockages in the hospital and also placing additional strain on Ambulance Victoria and an already stretched health system.

#### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (2358) My question is for the Treasurer. Over the past five years Cardinia shire has seen a 53 per cent increase in people sleeping rough, with more than 3800 households experiencing housing stress. To support my constituents, social and affordable housing in Cardinia must be raised from 0.9 per cent to 7 per cent. High windfall gains tax rates disincentivise councils from rezoning land to meet housing needs. Cardinia Shire Council has reported that they are already racing to keep up with maintenance costs of community facilities and amenities. Similarly, Knox City Council reported that after rezoning and tax expenses council funds are simply inadequate to develop and maintain the required affordable housing in the community. Will the Treasurer consider windfall gains tax exemptions for Cardinia and Knox councils for the purpose of social and affordable housing development?

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:58): (2359) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Safety. Minister, earlier this week a constituent contacted my office after witnessing a brawl involving weapons in Clyde North on Sunday afternoon. We all know that this government's million-dollar machete bin was a stunt, because it certainly has not done anything to help community safety. In fact it has been an epic failure. But in case anyone needed more proof, here it is: four teenage boys, one armed with a machete and others armed with other weapons, broke into a fight at Selandra Rise shopping centre. Two of the boys were injured. One was seriously injured. Many bystanders, including the constituent that called my office, are badly shaken by the incident. With many violent crimes and repeat offenders, this government's revolving door and so-called tough bail laws are in trouble. Minister, enough is enough. My constituents and I want to know: what is the government going to do to get machetes off the streets and crime under control in Victoria?

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2360) My question today is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The powerful owl is Australia's largest owl and has long called areas around my electorate home. They have been found in remnant habitat along the Yarra River corridor and places like the Banyule Flats, but the North East Link Program is threatening their habitat, their health and their wellbeing. Powerful owls are listed as vulnerable, and we should be doing all that we can to protect these magnificent creatures. Minister, what checks and monitoring are being done to ensure the health and survival of powerful owls around the vicinity of the North East Link construction sites?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:59): (2361) My constituency question is directed towards the Minister for Planning in the other place. The Kew Junction train and tram zone activity centre plan was released earlier this year. The activity centres program is about building more homes in areas with access to high-quality existing infrastructure, because the next generation also deserves a shot at owning a decent home. Located next to multiple transport options, great shops and top-quality schools, this is an ideal location for further housing development. My question is: how does the plan for this activity centre seek to improve local infrastructure and amenities in this area to accommodate an increase in population over the coming years?

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:00): (2362) My constituency question is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. A constituent of mine owns a small subdivided lot at 2A Roslyn Street, Burwood, on its own title, which fronts Roslyn Street, not the Burwood Highway. It has been drawn inside the SRL Burwood precinct boundary and is proposed for rezoning into the precinct zone. It is the only property on Roslyn Street caught in that boundary, and on its own it is far too small to ever support a six-storey-or-more area for development. For more than a year my constituent has been writing very precise, articulate and evidenced questions to both the SRL Authority and the minister as to why her property is being included, and she gets no clear answer at all. She has done everything through the proper channels, with no adequate answer. Will the minister provide the specific reasoning for the inclusion of 2A Roslyn Street within the precinct boundary, and will he ensure the inclusion is reviewed on its merits before the amendment is finalised?

**Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (13:01): (2363) My constituency question is to the Minister for Emergency Services and concerns the long-promised Armstrong Creek fire station. Armstrong Creek is one of Victoria's fastest growing communities, yet Labor still has not delivered the fire station it promised before the 2018 election. Almost eight years later the project has been delayed, shifted between agencies, caught up in land issues and pushed back again, while Geelong's southern growth

corridor continues to expand. The same community is also waiting longer for its promised ambulance station, now reportedly delayed to 2028–29. Despite hitting Victorians with a massive new emergency services levy, local infrastructure continues to languish. These delays leave locals exposed while emergency services response times remain under pressure across Geelong’s southern suburbs. Minister, when will the government finally deliver the Armstrong Creek fire station it promised in 2018?

### **Western Metropolitan Region**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (13:02): (2364) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health regarding the proposal to remove the vital oesophageal surgery service from the newly built \$1.5 billion Footscray Hospital. My constituent has been advised that the proposed centralisation of all oesophageal surgery services will be removed from the new Footscray Hospital despite it having the expertise and the capability to deliver them safely at the hospital. Footscray Hospital is already delivering high-quality oesophageal surgeries, with outcomes meeting international benchmarks and no recorded deaths with this high-risk emergency service. Can the minister please confirm and update my constituents as to why all patients are now required to travel a significant distance west to Geelong hospital or to Peter Mac in the east of Melbourne? Doctors and patients have raised concerns that this could lead to fragmented care and reduced access to emergency services and add strain to vulnerable patients and their families.

**Sitting suspended 1:03 pm until 2:02 pm.**

### *Motions*

#### **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

**Debate resumed.**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:02): I look to follow on from the debate that occurred before lunch and pick up on some of the commentary, including from Mrs McArthur, Dr Heath and Ms Bath. Just to pick up on some of Mrs McArthur’s commentaries about how people want hospitals, people want schools, people want services – absolutely they do. And that is what this Labor government has got on with delivering. Whether it is hospitals like Frankston or like Footscray, these hospitals are incredible. Whether it is maternity suites, whether it is mental health or whether it is operating suites, what these hospitals deliver, for not just the local communities but broad regions of Victorians, for patients and for staff, is absolutely world class. The 100 new schools that have been delivered, alongside our public early learning centres, alongside our kindergartens, are in this pipeline of investment. There is our public aged care. It is all incredibly important, and they are investments that those opposite would never make. There are our level crossing removals, new road infrastructure and of course regional rail. For regional rail, whether it is moving people around our state or indeed moving our agricultural freight, there is that underpinning set of values, creating policies and then rolling out the investment to actually get those projects built.

It is very easy to sit and say, ‘Wow, look, the state has spent money.’ Yes, the state has spent money investing in infrastructure and in services that are incredibly important. They are not just important now; they are important for generations of Victorians to come. Bolte had net debt of 55 per cent of gross state product. His government was a state builder. Whether it was roads, dams or powerlines, it was building infrastructure that we have all benefited from. You will not hear those opposite acknowledging the incredible work that has gone in to deliver massive projects like Metro, which is unlocking capacity and moving people around our state. The regional rail networks are connecting to it. I will resist the urge to talk about Jeff Kennett and what the Liberals did in the 1990s to all that, but it is an important point to make, the lack of investment from the Liberals – and not only that but the closures. I talked before about building and opening hospitals, schools, rail and roads. It was the opposite from the Liberals. When they had their stint, it was closures, it was privatisation and it was removing services.

I touched on aged care before. I am incredibly proud to have in Orbost and in Maffra – Orbost is now open, and Maffra is on the way – a \$100 million spend that will keep regional people in aged care in their communities near loved ones, ensuring that staff have brand new topnotch facilities to care for our aging people. That is something we should be proud of. When I go out to our early learning centres, I see day care and kindergarten in regional communities where we might not see private investment go in. So I think it is very easy to say, ‘Look, there’s investment, and that’s cost money.’ It is a lot harder to identify those values, get the policies, do the work and roll projects out, and I am really proud we have. We know the Liberals were opposed to the SEC, which is now on its third project. If you do not build this infrastructure, if you do not build these projects, it catches you down the line. Dr Heath talked about not talking about TAFE. I am proud to talk about TAFE because –

**Renee Heath:** That’s not what I said. I said we should be proud of it.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I will not misquote you. But anyway, TAFE is incredibly important. We are talking about rebuilding TAFE. We know that the Liberals closed TAFEs – I think it was 19 in regional Victoria or something like that – but we have built them back up. We have invested in the workforce, and the free TAFE pipeline enables us to have a generation of workers come through. We saw with the privatisation in the 1990s that there was not the pipeline of trainees and apprentices. I am proud that the government has committed to training pipelines for trainees and apprentices. We saw the recent announcement about apprentices through the SEC last week from the government. Mr Limbrick, I will pull you up on your comments. You said that the government should not get involved in the space but just let it all go and let the free market decide. When that happens, home owners turn around and say, ‘Why can’t I get a sparky?’, ‘Why can’t I get a plumber?’ or ‘Why can’t I get a tradie in my home?’ It is because we have not set the pipeline of workers. We want people who are going to do quality work. It is like the work on the Building and Plumbing Commission that went through here, the new legislation, in recent weeks. It is about ensuring that people that deliver work are appropriately trained. It is easy to say, ‘Hands off the wheel. We’ll let the market figure it all out.’ Then you get some of the most difficult cases. I know my aunty talks about it, being single and trying to work with trades, particularly if they are unregistered trades; it all gets so much more complicated. When those trades are registered and when they are well trained, the system just works so much better. People can get quality builds, and we do not have to worry about consumers spending all their time in courts and the billions of dollars lost there.

I just want to pick up on all that. Of course none of this –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I am going to come to things in my electorate shortly, Ms Crozier. I am going to come to all that shortly. I was not going to comment, but I will talk about the star recruits that they have lost opposite. The deputy leader of your party, the member for Nepean, packed up and left. Three leaders in this house in this term sit opposite me. We have had one leader in this term. How can Victorians trust you to deliver infrastructure in this state? How can Victorians trust you to deliver infrastructure when you cannot sort your own party out, when you are in the courts and when you are rolling each other every six to 12 months? Victorians know that you do not have their best interests at heart. You only have your own self-interest at heart. That is the Victorian Liberal Party – completely self-interested.

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! Can we all hold the yelling down just a little bit, please?

**Tom McINTOSH:** Just to finish off, Dr Bach – an incredible talent – went to the other side of the world, as far as he could get away from you lot. But anyway, we will leave it there.

The investment that has been made is critically important. That is not to excuse any illegal activity, and this government has been clear about its zero tolerance of illegal activity. The Liberals opposed the Labour Hire Authority. You opposed it in its initial legislation. You opposed the additional regulatory powers that were brought in last year because you are fundamentally opposed to ensuring that pay and conditions and well-regulated trades are operating in this state. I have not even got to the comments I wanted to make about clearly having values and clearly having policies for things like getting women into workforces. You only have to look at the federal Liberal Party, who have got six out of 61 members of the legislative assembly federally and 33 per cent of the caucus, to see what a failure not identifying those values and not having policies to enact them is.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:12): I thank everybody for their contributions, but I must say Mr Batchelor's and Mr McIntosh's contributions left a lot to be desired. I mean, to give us a lecture about women – for a start, you cannot even confirm what a woman is over on that side. That is your problem. Mr Batchelor spent a considerable amount of time telling the house that I was inaccurate, that I did not know what I was talking about and that my contribution was somehow riddled with errors. But what he did not do at any stage was provide an actual example. That is quite telling, because in the two matters he did attempt to raise, he was wrong. First, he suggested that I somehow made a call today for increased spending on integrity agencies. I did not. My only reference to integrity agency funding was that they starve – you starve – the integrity agencies of the budget and the powers they need and then undermine the people of standing like Geoffrey Watson, Robert Redlich, Deborah Glass, who dare to point it out.

Seriously, this was about corruption, about integrity, about covering up reports that the public have a right to see and about \$15 billion of taxpayers money, which you all are quite happy to see go to corrupt criminals, bikies and strippers, leaving the taxpayer totally bereft. You talked about all the things you could do or you have done. Think how much more could have been done with \$15 billion – and probably counting. This inquiry in Queensland is still going on. Who knows what else they will find about the corruption in the Big Build project here in Victoria and your association with the CFMEU? It is legendary. One of your members of Parliament seems to support a member of the CFMEU, Mr Setka. She stands alongside of him. She gives endorsements and references to people that are criminals. Seriously, when you talk about what is going on in this state you want to be careful, because it is you who is abusing the taxpayer and abusing every rightful person in this state who deserves better. You are especially abusing women. You talk about putting women in the workforce. We absolutely support women in the workforce, but we do not support them being abused and used by corrupt criminals. That is what we do not support. We do not support the fact that it is a union takeover on every worksite. Anybody should be free to either join or not join a union and also join another union.

Intimidation, graft and corruption are your modus operandi. It is your DNA. You cannot stop abusing taxpayer money. This motion is about integrity in government. It is about the corruption that has pervaded this state in projects. Every single one of them is billions of dollars over budget and over time. Nothing in this state gets done with good use of taxpayer money – it does not. We on this side of the house, with crossbench support, have called for a royal commission into this corruption. You objected to it. You would never do it because you have got too much to hide. You are absolutely embroiled in a level of corruption that is next level in this state. There has never been corruption on this scale identified in Victoria before. You should be standing with us to support this motion. I do expect the crossbench to do the right thing and support this motion, because this is on behalf of the taxpayers of Victoria. They have a right to be better treated. They have a right to know what has happened to every dollar of their hard-earned taxpayer money. \$15 billion worth of it has gone down the gurgler –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** and counting, as Ms Crozier said. Thank you to the LNP government in Queensland for conducting the inquiry. It could not have got underway here, but it is underway there and it is ongoing – and good for that. Please, all crossbench members, support this motion.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Planning policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:18): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) planning scheme amendment GC270 was gazetted on 31 March 2026 and tabled in this house on 1 April 2026 and allows high-rise and high-density development without adequate checks and balances, including the central involvement of local councils and communities in 26 high-rise, high-density zones;
  - (b) planning scheme amendment VC300 was gazetted on 19 March 2026 and tabled in this house on 31 March 2026 and allows development up to six storeys without council or community input;
- (2) pursuant to section 38(2) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, revokes:
  - (a) amendment GC270 to Banyule, Bayside, Boroondara, Darebin, Glen Eira, Maribyrnong, Merri-bek, Monash and Stonnington Planning Schemes; and
  - (b) amendment VC300 to the Victoria Planning Provisions.

Let us be very clear what these do. They are called activity centres, but they are actually nodes of high-rise, high-density development where the state government is stripping out normal controls and normal planning rules and stripping out the involvement of councils, communities and people who live in these areas, fundamentally, to have a say in the future of their neighbourhood, of their township, of the properties in and around their own home and of matters around planning for the future of their area, the services and the quality of life in the areas.

We all agree that there need to be more homes. We all agree that the government needs to work to bring forward homes and development. But this government has spectacularly failed in bringing forward developments, and now it thinks it will use a blunt instrument which will destroy the livability and quality of life in metropolitan Melbourne. That is what it is designed to do, and this is the first round. GC270 plus the 10 large trial areas beforehand is a very significant tranche of Melbourne and the suburbs of Melbourne. VC300 is a change that allows the cookie-cutter-style development of so-called townhouses, but they are actually boxes of apartments up to six storeys that will not require normal planning permits, can be built almost to the fence, can strip most of the property of its vegetation and can do that in a way that destroys the quality of life in a particular suburb. You see this happen. It goes into a suburb. The development at first, in one property, makes a modest difference only. But suddenly there are two, there are three and there are more running down the street, stripping out the longstanding vegetation and destroying the quality of life in the municipality. That is where we are heading: these dense nodes, up to 20 storeys in some areas, with different levels in various spots, surrounded by the six-storey zones that will enable the government to push for the development.

The economics of this are not good, and a number of building groups and construction groups have made very clear that the finances of this do not stack up. With the government's tax regime, in many cases almost 50 per cent of the cost of a new property is taxation, and the government has not addressed this. In fact they have landed more and more and more taxes onto properties, including yesterday. They added more growth areas infrastructure contribution charges onto the GAIC on the edge of the city. They did that yesterday – an almost 3 per cent increase in GAIC across the edge of the city. If you want to make housing more affordable, a new tax on top of it is not the way to make it more affordable. And the windfall gains tax: we heard Ms Payne earlier in the day making some very reasonable points about the windfall gains tax and its impact on council land and the ability of council to develop properties, including houses. The truth of the matter is that 50 per cent of the uplift value is

scooped away by the government if a council goes forward and develops some properties in its area. We say we want more houses, and yet we are making it more and more and more difficult.

We had a debate in this chamber the other day about the Clyde South PSP, the precinct structure plan down there that is eight years late because of the delays and incompetence of the state government. If you want to bring forward housing, bring forward housing. Do not block it at every turn like the Labor government has done. The PSP down there is entirely the fault of the Labor government. The PSP in Clyde South is entirely due to the decision of the state government to cause trouble with many of the PSPs. There are huge tracts of land where the state government has not brought anything forward. We know what happened down in Fishermans Bend. Eighty thousand people could be down there. They have been in power now for 14 years, and they have done next to nothing to bring forward opportunities for land in that area. I have picked Maribyrnong and their huge defence site out there, 128 hectares – nothing is being done there. So let us not hear from this government any lectures about bringing forward housing. Let us point to this government's failure to bring forward housing and point to this government's failure to remove taxes. In fact what they are doing is increasing taxes, increasing regulation, making it harder and harder and harder to bring forward. They think the solution is to knock over huge areas of the city.

I want to bring something forward today which is quite new. The Treasurer has tabled in this chamber a set of briefs that were there when she came to the role. This brief, on page 136, for those who want to read it, from the tabled documents says:

Whole of Government oversight and significant decisions on housing policy and programs for the Treasurer  
Planning: The Treasurer has a key role in overseeing the implementation of the Housing Statement, in particular the 800,000-dwelling target. Several of the Housing Statement initiatives relate to planning.

Then this document briefing the new Treasurer moves to the activity centres program, the ACP, as they call it.

... this program relaxes planning restrictions to enable housing supply growth in well located areas with access to public transport. The ACP should be expanded to an additional 150 train stations and tram line locations –

150 so-called activity centres; these are high-rise, high-density zones –

by 2028 to reach the 800,000 target.

They know they cannot reach their target, so what they are going to do is sweep aside all of the protections and controls in this state so that they will be able to build high-rise, high-density zones in 150 zones. That is what they have identified, and that is how they intend to get to 800,000. That is not 25, not 60 but 150 high-rise zones. That is 20 storeys, 20 storeys, 20 storeys, 20 storeys, 20 storeys 150 times over across the city – no controls, no checks, no balances. This is an authoritarian government – an arrogant government, a long time in power. 150 sites and they are going to strip out everything. It will all be gone. The quality of the city is going to be destroyed. 150 sites –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** This is out of a document – your government's document.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! All right, enough. Mr Davis is yelling right in my ear and I can barely hear him. It is coming from both sides. Mr Davis to continue yelling; everyone else to keep it down, please.

**David DAVIS:** Thank you, Acting President, for your guidance. This list is an important list, and people need to understand what is going on here: Auburn; Brunswick train and tram zone; Carnegie; Coburg; Darling – all of these are on the list; East Malvern; Gardiner and Glen Iris – they roll them together but they are actually separate; Glenferrie; Hampton; Hawthorn; Heidelberg; High Street, Thornbury; Holmesglen; Hughesdale; Kew Junction; Middle Brighton station; Middle Footscray station, including Seddon – that is two really there; Murrumbeena; North Brighton; Oakleigh;

Sandringham; St Georges Road, Thornbury; Tooronga station; Malvern Village; Tottenham, Braybrook – Central West; and West Footscray station. And that is before –

**Michael Galea:** But you want to put it all in the outer suburbs instead.

**David DAVIS:** 150 they want – 150 of these high-rise, high-density zones. The cat is out of the bag. We know it is not about 25 or 60 – it is about 150 high-rise, high-density zones sweeping across the city without control, tearing away heritage – heritage protection is zero in these zones. We know that to be the case. Loss of vegetation – we had one of the government members talking about vegetation in the chamber yesterday but ignoring the fact that actually the main thing they are doing with 150 zones now is they are stripping out every tree, clear-felling every property, clear-felling every tree, removing them and knocking them out. That is what happens. That is what you do. And there are no controls: heritage is not protected and vegetation is not protected.

We want to see what occurs as we go forward. But let me just say: the first step we can take today is to disallow these two amendments in the single motion – two amendments that are a further set of nails in the coffin for a livable Melbourne. I want to thank the many community groups that have communicated with me on this, particularly Livable Victoria. Right across the city, people have spoken to me and other members of the opposition, making points about the quality of life they want to preserve and the democracy they wish to see in place. Even if you do not have a view about the quality of life and livability, you should be worried about people's local democratic rights. People have a right to participate in decision-making in their own towns. They have a right to participate in decision-making.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, let me just explain. I have observed the one in Kew. Here is another key point. I have just observed the Kew one. A planning amendment was put in by the minister. It was swept aside through a section 20(4) action. She did it in her office and did not consult with anyone. The council needed to be strong. In this case the council has been weak, and I put that on the record. The Boroondara council has been weak. They have largely all been weak. Sophie Torney has been weak. All of those ones have been weak on Kew. Let me be clear: a developer brought forward a proposal for the development of 18 storeys and the like. They say, in the government documents, it is 16 storeys. But let us be clear what this is: 16 storeys discretionary – a discretionary height limit. I can tell you what, a discretionary height limit is no height limit at all. If they say 16, it does not mean 16. If they say eight, it does not mean eight, as we saw in Kew. Eighteen storeys, in my old arithmetic, when I went to school, is bigger than 16.

**Lizzie Blandthorn:** Matthew Guy put 20 storeys in Pentridge – 20. It was us that had to fix it.

**David DAVIS:** Well, let me just say I am not going to answer for every development that has gone on in the past. But let me just say you want to do 20 in a whole series of places. Would you like me to read where you are going to do 20, as you say?

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Order! I do not want to stand up again. I will get puffed.

**David DAVIS:** There are very significant heights here: 20 storeys at Coburg station, 28 storeys at Darling, 20 storeys at Brunswick and 16 storeys at Auburn. I mean, it is absurd. These are not mandatory height limits, these are discretionary height limits introduced by your planning minister's planning amendment. These are discretionary height limits that will not stick. They will not stick. Discretionary – it will not stick. As we have seen in Kew, this is the first cab off the rank. The 16 storeys has just been blasted away. The council were too weak to do the full fight that they needed to do and say, 'No, we will not support this. You can go away.' We cannot stop the minister doing certain things, that is true, but they do not have to provide even the slightest green light to a government

minister that is intent on destroying parts of the city in an arrogant way. That is what we have got with this minister, that is what we have got with this Premier and that is the situation we are all facing now.

I want to make some other points as we proceed here. For the Ashburton centre it says eight storeys, but nobody who is half-sensible believes eight is eight. Again, it is a discretionary height limit. It could mean 10, it could mean 12 or it could mean 16 storeys even. But we know from the consultation process how shoddy and shonky this is. We know from people who have been in that process who have come out and spoken, and I have at least three from that process who have spoken at length to me about what occurred over the so-called two-day weekend consultation in Docklands. They held it in Docklands. A consultancy group – I am not going to cast aspersions on them, but they are there as paid guns, hired guns, to do what they are told. They are using AI to generate some of the views. People said, ‘No, no, we don’t want AI generating our views at our consultation. We want our consultation to reflect what we’ve said, not what AI goes out and searches and finds.’ That was one of the points.

The second point is that all through the presentation the consultants were saying there are some who think they are against it and there are a few for it, so it is kind of evenly balanced. And people were saying, ‘No, it’s not evenly balanced. It’s 10 to one against it.’ And this is the panel they’re consulting. This is –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** Well, that is what they told me, the three people who were there, one of whom up in the gallery right now. Three people who were there have told me that the overwhelming predominance of people were against the proposals. But the consultants are trying to say, ‘There are a few in favour and a few against; people have got mixed views.’ No, people do not have mixed views. People have overwhelmingly negative views. I have to say people should be very angry about this consultation process. They have not been properly consulted, but planning changes are put in. They are pushing forward – the government is going to do this, and it has to be resisted. One way to resist it is to vote against these planning amendments today. These planning amendments can be disallowed. There is a long history of disallowance by this chamber. What would the government do if it was disallowed today? Well, we do not know what they would do, but let me just say that in the case of Ormond or in the case of Markham estate a good result was achieved because the government moderated its planning proposals. It watered them down. It moderated them in a way that met broader community acceptance. That was this chamber holding the government to account through revocation motions and the government then responding in a more sensible way.

I think this government, to be truthful, has moved on and has become harder line, more resistant and more arrogant. They have been in power much longer of course and they are showing all the signs of a long-distance, long-term government that is tired, arrogant and very far out of touch. So it is possible that if this is disallowed, they will try and remake a version substantially the same, in which case the chamber ought to resist quite strongly. The chamber ought to make it clear that if we disallow or revoke this today, that is a legal decision of the chamber and it should be enforced as such. It is a matter for the chamber of course, but that is what I would say. I would hope that if these two planning amendments were revoked today, that would be a start in the process of the government reviewing its position, thinking more carefully and working with communities and councils.

There was the planning bill that went through last year, the amendments that we dealt with last year and the inquiry, and I thank the people who put submissions into those and made it clear that those amendments were also very, very problematic. So we have got a sequence of these now occurring – the 10 trial zones, the next tranche that we are dealing with today on GC270, the VC300, which actually allows high-rise, high-density right around that area and sweeps right across major tracts of the suburbs. If we are not careful, we will wake up in just a very small number of years with huge damage, and it will not be the kind of damage that actually houses our kids. It will be high-level developments that are expensive. Most of these apartments are \$1 million or more for two bedrooms –

that is the truth of the matter – and most young people cannot afford those sorts of numbers. One reason they are so expensive is because of the costs embedded in them by this government.

I say this is an opportunity to send a clear message. If you think that if we do not stand up, we are not going to lose our city, you are wrong. The government has 150 in plan – (*Time expired*)

*Interjections from gallery.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Just before Ms Watt starts, this is not an interactive activity, if we can just not clap or anything like that.

**Georgie Crozier:** The precedent was set, Acting President Bourman, with the treaty.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** That is fabulous, Ms Crozier, but if people could not clap, that would be great.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:38): I am rising today to frankly oppose the motion moved by Mr Davis. Whether it is the sheer heartbreak of missing out on yet another rental property or the exhaustion of repeatedly being priced out at auctions, the reality on the ground is stark. Young Victorians are genuinely giving up on the great dream of home ownership, feeling that the market has completely left them behind. Yet while working families and young people struggle just to find a roof over their heads, the opposition is choosing to use this precious time in Parliament to try and block the very planning reforms designed to build more homes. It is just not right, and it shows, to my mind, a complete disconnect from the challenges facing ordinary Victorians.

Our focus in this place needs to be on building homes, not blocking them, and the reforms we are discussing today do exactly that. The Liberals have time and time again stood in the way of housing. It is very easy to care about an abstract concept of a perfect planning scheme when you already have a comfortable place of your own to go home to at night. But how do we tell young people that their dream of finding their own place will just have to wait until we find an opportunity to debate ‘the perfect’ in this place? What we need are comprehensive reforms right now that make it easier to find a place to call home, because it is becoming harder and harder for many Victorians, particularly the younger generation, who face a market unlike anything their parents experienced. The numbers tell us how difficult it is, with the average rental in Melbourne now costing around \$580 per week and the average mortgage repayment sitting at around \$4000 a month. If you are a household earning a standard median income, you could likely only afford about 12 per cent of the homes currently on the market, and that figure drops to a heartbreaking 3 per cent for low- and middle-income families. Home ownership rates are declining. People born more recently are buying homes much later in life than the generations that came before them – if they can manage to buy a home at all.

The underlying problem we are facing is incredibly simple: housing prices are too high because there are not enough homes to go around. The approach to fix this is clear. To make homes more affordable, we need to build more of them where people want to live. That is exactly why this government launched *Plan for Victoria*, which sets out a 30-year plan to guide the delivery of more homes in livable, sustainable communities. It is a plan written by Victorians for Victorians, shaped by the largest consultation process this state has ever seen. There were more than 110,000 Victorians engaged online or in person, producing hundreds of detailed submissions and more than 15,000 individual items of feedback. Victorians told us loudly and clearly that we need to build more homes and we need to build them right now, and this government is listening and delivering on that mandate.

What we are doing is exactly what the community asked us to do with the specific planning amendments before us today. The first part of what is being considered is GC270, which is the core component of the train and tram zone activity centre program, delivering capacity for more than 300,000 homes across Victoria’s inner and middle-ring suburbs, ensuring there is growth closer to established suburbs and closer to transport, jobs and services. We have finalised our plans for more homes in 35 well-located train and tram zones across Victoria, and we are actively working to complete

another 25 locations close to public transport, reliable jobs and vital services. This program had two rigorous rounds of community consultation throughout 2025, with over 10,000 submissions, survey responses and conversations across 32 community events – some of which I went to in Northern Metropolitan Region – and 17 community reference group meetings. Mr Davis likes to claim that these changes lack adequate checks and balances, but the plans directly leverage the councils' own strategic work and local consultation processes, including the extensive work done in places like Carnegie, Heidelberg and Coburg. Each of those plans that undertook council-led public consultation have also contributed directly to this program. These planning amendments are guided by *Plan for Victoria* and are entirely about making the housing system easier and more affordable for working people.

The second part of this revocation motion concerns VC300, which created the Mid-rise Code. This builds on our highly successful Townhouse and Low-rise Code to create consistent deemed-to-comply standards across the state for mid-rise developments between four and six storeys. We removed third-party appeals for a very specific reason, which is to provide absolute certainty for proposals that meet the standard so we can get on and build the homes that we need, instead of letting them get tied up in legal bureaucracy for months on end. The Mid-rise Code sets incredibly high standards for good development, creating homes that are comfortable and energy efficient and fit seamlessly into the neighbourhood fabric. If these strict standards are met, neighbours will still be notified and will still have their say – that is right. However, the project will not be subject to third-party review at VCAT – that is what I am saying. This provides the certainty needed for proposals to meet all the rules so we can get on and build the homes we need.

We will gladly put our record of building homes against the opposition's record of blocking homes every single day of the week. We have built more homes each and every year since we came into government than those opposite did in their highest year of new home builds. We are the party of the builders; they are the party of the blockers. Yet again today we see them in the chamber trying to block homes. We can look closely at the record in the community – I can certainly do that; I am very, very happy to do that. I could do it all day. When their members are literally stood on the back of a ute protesting two crucial housing projects in Hawthorn, it tells you everything you need to know. They protested 350 homes, which included at least 10 per cent affordable housing, at the former University of Melbourne site, and an additional 206 social and affordable homes adjacent to that site, and the member for Brighton committed to closing down vital housing for rough sleepers at 226 South Road in Brighton East in 2018 and wanted to sell the site off.

In 2024 he also opposed 84 townhouses on the former Xavier College campus just 350 metres from Brighton Beach station, and he actually organised a protest against the announcement of Brighton as one location of the 50 new train and tram zones. The member for Malvern, just to mix it up a bit, tried to block 60 new apartments in Glen Iris in 2024, apartments which included 10 per cent affordable housing. We were championing that housing, located close to schools, medical centres, shops and local parks and built alongside what would have been a new supermarket within 500 metres of a tram stop. I might perhaps bring it to a member of this chamber and talk about a former housing minister who entirely gave the game away – and I recall it happening right here – when she said:

There is no point putting a very low income, probably welfare-dependent family in the best street in Brighton where the children cannot mix with others ... or where they do not have the same ability to have the latest in sneakers and iPhones ...

This is exactly what those opposite really think about providing affordable housing in well-serviced areas for working families. They just want to lock people out; it is really clear.

It is only a Labor government that is making the housing system easier and more affordable for Victorians looking to buy or rent a home, creating more opportunities and greater diversity for young Victorians and their families. We have set clear housing targets for every local government area in Victoria, giving certainty about where homes will be built and putting councils on notice right across the state, because we want them to be enablers, not blockers. We have extended the off-the-plan stamp

duty savings and provided more local infrastructure funding. We are delivering a 10-year pipeline of land for family homes. We are committing to a new building watchdog. We are building more social homes in the region. There is the massive Big Housing Build and an \$860 million boost to the Social Housing Growth Fund. This is all about us having access to decent homes in good communities right across our state. The status quo is not an option, and we will not stop working to build the homes that Victorians need.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:48): The Greens will not be supporting this motion today, and not because we do not agree with many of the concerns being raised by the substantial number of community members who have reached out. It is because this is not the answer to the concerns that they have been raising. As I have said before, the Greens do not object to increasing housing density around trains and transport hubs; it just makes sense. In this we fundamentally differ from the Liberals, who have outlined their plan to put even more density in the CBD, already one of the densest cities in the country, and contribute to urban sprawl through expansion of greenfield areas to eat up remaining peri-urban agricultural land and precious grasslands. We do not agree with that approach to planning. We believe that having more people close to transport and the services they need, when done well and supported by community infrastructure, improves climate outcomes, reduces loss of green wedges and habitat, reduces car dependency, improves livability and creates opportunities for small business. We also believe that the planning system could do with an overhaul to reduce unnecessary complexity and duplication but also modernisation to meet contemporary challenges like environmental protection and climate change. Indeed that is something that planning experts have long called for.

That does not mean we agree with the direction the government is going with planning, either. We have many concerns about the government's entire planning agenda and in particular the ideologies that underpin them. Firstly, they continue to do nothing to create more affordable housing. The affordable housing head of power that the Greens secured as part of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 changes has not yet been made use of by this government. Regulations with ambitious targets need to be established urgently to ensure that the activity centre program is not a wasted opportunity to deliver a significant uplift in the amount of public and community housing that we are building. I have argued strongly against the notion that market-led supply will somehow lead to trickle-down affordable housing. Leaving the provision of a basic human right, in this case housing, to the market is destined to fail. The number of people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity and waiting on the public housing register is a shameful stain on this government, and that is before you consider all the young people who will never be able to afford their own home. Labor's solution, which is to hand the keys of our housing system and planning system over to property developers, shows how beholden this government is to developer interests, which it chooses to put above those of everyday Victorians.

Secondly, while we were able to secure the establishment of the planning regulations advisory committee (PRAC) – which I will say a bit more about later – and we welcome the additional consultation that occurred in a few more steps taken in developing these planning scheme amendments, fundamentally we believe that communities and councils should have more say in planning decisions. There has never been a good case made for why the centralisation of power around planning will lead to better or even faster decisions. The evidence suggests otherwise, with councils waiting years for planning scheme amendment approvals and poor planning decisions being made because they do not respect the local context.

Thirdly, we need housing and precincts built that are great places to live – not just with decent designs but that are climate resilient, robust and comfortable to live in. Slapdash building at the bare minimum standards that leaves people paying a fortune in insurance, maintenance, repairs and heating and cooling, with little access to green space, in hot concrete and asphalt suburbs just simply is not good enough in 2026. The government's response, tabled yesterday, to the select committee inquiry into planning conducted last year indicates the government apparently will review the environmentally

sustainable design standards in the townhouse code as well as tree and vegetation impacts of the code. But I note the same problems are repeated in the Mid-rise Code, which is the subject of the motion today. Similarly, the turning off of certain environmental concerns in the codified schemes remains a concern in the Mid-rise Code, although as with the ESD standards, the government has agreed to review this. I am just not confident, as it stands, that this will result in any change.

As a further example of where planning is going wrong in this state, while not the subject of this motion, we are deeply concerned about developers using the development facilitation pathway to bypass usual council processes under the guise of delivering public benefits that in many cases are pretty nebulous or that they fail to actually make good on. Note that this pathway has existed for several years now and is already being used to get concessions like height exemptions, including in areas that may be activity centres. The Assemble debacle – I would encourage anyone who has not heard about it to look up what happened in that scenario – is a really good case in point.

One thing I will note is that we have really tried to engage genuinely with the government about some of these planning changes that they are making, and we have done so with the community's interest at heart. We have managed to secure some changes to planning laws and processes that would not have been possible if we had just sat on the sidelines and said no. For example, we ensured that as part of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 changes the government set up a planning regulations advisory committee with guaranteed membership of councils, planners and planning experts. They form the large majority of the representation on that committee. That group is being charged with reviewing all of these planning scheme amendments, and I understand, I am told, that based on the feedback of this group as well as recommendations from the planning inquiry last year, there are things happening. For example, apparently there are revisions being made to the townhouse code with respect to tree canopy. I welcome that and look forward to seeing that if it does indeed occur. They will also have to review all existing codes and regulations, including the townhouse code and the Mid-rise Code, and provide advice before planning permit reforms are implemented. They will not actually be implemented until October 2027. So there is some improvement there. Hopefully with this process at least these groups are getting some input, we believe. These planning scheme amendments, likewise, that we are talking about today are hopefully not set-and-forget – they can be adjusted, they can be amended and the PRAC will hopefully be able to review them and provide input.

One thing, and I have said this before, is we cannot legislate good engagement. What we have been able to do is get key groups and key voices a seat at the table. Now, I agree with the many community members who have contacted me that all of this – you know, we have tried to make things a bit better – is not good enough. The reality is this is Labor's planning agenda. We have done what we can from the position that we are in to try and make things a bit better, but it is important to realise we do not get to write the agenda – it is just not the way this works. While it might feel cathartic to give the government a whack by disallowing these planning scheme amendments, it would be nothing other than a minor nuisance to them – and I actually half-suspect that they were looking forward to it so they could make a bit of noise about how we are all a bunch of NIMBYs blocking housing.

What will happen is they will reintroduce the same planning scheme amendments tomorrow. It was the same situation when a different set of disallowance motions were brought before this Parliament. It would not result in a single bit of meaningful change for the communities, and for all the people who have an interest in this issue, it would not change a thing for them. There is nothing in the laws or regulations that we have that stops them from reintroducing the same planning scheme amendments tomorrow. I appreciate that perhaps some others may think that there is a different process that applies. I have sought advice from the clerks. I am told that that is the case, and I will rely on that advice. I think that is sound advice. For what it is worth, the government also believe that they can just reintroduce them tomorrow, and they have told me that is exactly what they will do. Unless the Liberal Party plan to use every one of their general business debate spots from now until the end of the year repeating these disallowance motions – I doubt that is something you are prepared to do – I would ask: what exactly are we achieving today other than a symbolic motion by disallowing two planning

scheme amendments? It is effectively a game of whack-a-mole. If we thought supporting this would do what people are asking, it would be a completely different proposition. Sending these planning scheme amendments back to the same office that produced them is not going to fix the issues with these individual planning scheme amendments, let alone put the brakes on the government's planning agenda, and lead to a complete rewrite in the interests of the community and our environment. The only way to change that is to change who is writing them.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:57): If I can carry on from Dr Mansfield, the only way to change this is to change the government in November. What Mr Davis has brought to the chamber this afternoon is a motion that actually is a reasonable part of what we are talking about around these planning scheme amendments that are affecting so many members of the community and, as he articulated in his contribution, the unreasonableness of the government and what they are doing. As you said, Dr Mansfield, in your contribution, there are not insignificant numbers of people that have contacted you with concerns around this. Yes, there are thousands of people that are contacting us, and I have been to community forums where hundreds and hundreds of people have come out to speak of their concerns around the government's agenda on this issue.

Mr Davis's motion is a reasonable approach, as he has highlighted. Many of the members in this house were not here when we did those revocations for Markham. It was a reasonable approach that got an outcome for the community. As Mr Davis highlighted, in our electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region we are not averse to high-density areas. We have got those. We have got those along Southbank, along St Kilda Road and in Forest Hill. In fact the minister Luba Grigorovitch lives in South Yarra. She does not live in Kororoit, which she actually represents – not many of them do.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER**: I beg your pardon, Mr Davis – 51 storeys. We are very used to high-density areas in our electorate. But what the government is doing is this massive, massive build in areas where there are established suburbs, where there are communities. I want to come to some of the comments that I have got from community members. They are they wanting to do not just the 10 centres or the 60-odd centres that they are speaking about but, as Mr Davis said with that document, the briefing to the Treasurer, 150 activity centres, which I find absolutely horrifying. They are doing that to reach the target that they said they would do of 800,000 builds. That is why they are doing these activity centres. They are panicking, but in the process they are riding roughshod over communities, and they are not giving a say to the communities or to local councils in these developments. The other ridiculous thing about this is that many of these homes in these areas are unaffordable. The Urban Development Institute of Australia commissioned a report, and in that report it spoke of the costs around how expensive the construction is and how expensive these towers are going to be. In fact Linda Allison, the chief executive of the UDIA Victoria, said:

... there has been an assumption that higher density housing in established suburbs would deliver more homes "but the economics just don't stack up".

Furthermore:

Delivering new apartment projects in Melbourne has become increasingly unviable, even in locations where demand for housing remains strong.

They go on to talk about how expensive it is. As we have been saying through the debate, largely those costs are increasing because of the taxes that this very government is putting on construction costs, and they are enormous. Forty-odd per cent of costs in construction in housing is because of this government's taxes. This is a government that, when it came into power, promised no new taxes. Well, we have had 67 new or increased taxes, and those taxes are only driving up the cost of construction and housing. I have spoken to people that are in the sector, in the industry, who are experts in this, and they will tell you exactly why this government's model is flawed.

In the time that I have remaining I want to just acknowledge some of the commentary around what people are concerned about. One such constituent wrote to me and wrote to his local member Mr Staikos around the concerns that they had where they live in McKinnon. As he said in his email to Mr Staikos and me, and Mr Davis is included in it – and he makes a very good point, actually:

On Wednesday 14th January 2026, we found a small double-sided flyer in our letter box. The flyer measures 14.5 cm wide x 10.5 cm high ... This flyer has a QR code leading to a survey to give ... feedback, a survey that opened on 20th October 2025 and closed on 30th November 2025 ...

So it was too late in that stage 1 process, the consultation. They did not even have an opportunity to be able to do that. They went on to say to Mr Staikos:

... when you wanted to be re-elected most recently, we received so much paper mail from you and your government, our phones were bombarded with texts and emails, and you and your government made every conceivable effort to promote yourselves at any cost.

Now that you and your government want to destroy entire neighbourhoods and communities, which will have a significant impact on ALL of its residents, the first we hear of it is ... a flyer which is almost the size of “one sheet of toilet paper”.

I think that says it all. I think that just sums it up – the lack of consultation, the lack of ability for people to actually express a genuine concern around that and how it has played out with this government not even allowing councils. I have spoken to planners within local councils who talk about the issues that they already have. They are already hitting the housing targets through their own programs, and they are worried about amenity around things like drainage, roads and services. We know that in areas there is significant pressure on the system already, and everybody knows that. There are a lot of people that have come to this state in the last decade – over a million people have come to this state – so there is going to be pressure on the system, and yes, there is going to be more housing. But there lies the problem in relation to the government, through their inability to manage circumstance and what they are trying to do. At the same time they are not allowing community members to have their say in the way that they deserve. As people have said to me:

... the one size fits all activity centres proposal the Victorian Government has put forward is unnecessary and will ruin the character and amenity of our suburb ... It will be to the detriment of working families who choose to live in housing close to schools and other important public amenities.

The government’s proposals that they are putting forward will not achieve the aim, they say, by destroying the very amenities that the government says that people have a right to live near – and they do; there is no question about that. If you go out into the western suburbs, they will talk about the lack of services and how they feel they have been abandoned by Labor over many, many years. People do have a right to all of those social services – to education and health – but they also have a right to their own areas. When they do go into a community where they have wanted to move to and go into an area where they have perhaps saved up and decided that they want to be, they do not want to see a government coming over the top of them and them not having any say in what their future suburb is going to look like – that it will be torn up and that where they have moved to, what they have invested in and where their home is, which is so important, and that local area which is so important to them and their families is going to be absolutely destroyed. Hundreds and literally thousands of people have expressed their concerns to me and, I know, to Mr Davis and to many of my colleagues because they have never seen anything like this. This is a government that is not giving them a proper say. They did not take this plan to the last election. They had no idea of it. This is a government that is riding roughshod over people, and it is a very dangerous precedent for this government to be setting.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:07): I would like to begin with a quote, a quote that was actually put in this place just a few years ago. And it is a very good quote, I think. It reads:

I believe it is immoral that large sections of our inner cities, flush with good transport, schools, health care and other infrastructure, remain almost flat, with obsolete overlays denying young Victorians a chance to buy their first home where they want to live.

...

We have to do all we can to stop young Victorians in our migrant community from becoming an asset-less generation.

A very good quote indeed – a quote in fact by the current Liberal Deputy Leader of the Opposition in this place Evan Mulholland in a speech in this place just over three years ago. Will the good Liberals please stand up? Where are you? He is not here. Where is he? He is not here.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Well, I look forward to his contribution, Mr Davis, because, sadly, the few Liberals who see sense on this subject, who see the generational inequity, have been drowned out by the unctuous likes of Mr Davis in his absolute determined intent to block housing for young Victorians. Again, Mr Mulholland had a very good quote, a very good thing he said, but he has been silenced – that, or he has backflipped. I do not know. I look forward to his contribution in this place today where he can account for himself to the young Victorians as to what he actually believes. Does he actually believe in that still, or does he not believe in anything? What we believe this side is that the status quo is not good enough. For generations governments of both persuasions have put forward grand plans of how we can redress the balance and stop the relentless urban sprawl by shifting more of this state's growth into established and middle-ring areas. For generations, governments of both persuasions have put those plans in place and not acted on them. This is not that government. This is not that same tired old government that Mr Davis and Ms Crozier want to drag us back to.

This is a government that recognises that we have a serious problem. Young people in this state and multicultural people moving to this state want the same fair go that generations before them had, indeed when we had a Liberal Party that believed in those aspirations. We are at a crisis point with housing. Many experts, including the Grattan Institute, have said that the number one lever that state governments can pull when it comes to providing more housing – fairer, more affordable housing – is planning controls, and that is exactly what this government is doing. At every step of the way we have found ourselves faced with the likes of Mr Davis and his unctuous snobbery in saying, 'Not in my backyard. You can all live in the outer suburbs.' We have seen him bringing up these examples of precinct structure plans.

I do want to talk about Clyde, as I tend to a lot in this place. I am very proud to represent the growing outer communities in the outer south-east suburbs, including Clyde North. We are seeing incredibly fast growth there, as Mr Limbrick knows too. In the past four years we have opened six new government schools, invested in two non-government schools, countless road upgrades, bus services and a new community hospital. We are making these investments. We are running as hard as we can, and we are barely keeping pace. If you were to talk to some of our constituents today, some might say that we are not. We are growing simply too fast in our outer suburbs, and it is not sustainable. If you go to them and say, 'Do you want us to rebalance that? Let's maybe have some of these inner middle-ring suburbs take more of that load. Or do you want five more Clyde Norths built behind you?' I think it is pretty clear what they would say. But we know that the Liberals in this place do not care, because this is a motion that is not interested in the aspirations of young Victorians and it is not interested in the livability of our outer suburbs either. If they did care about it, they would be coming in saying, 'Put all the development there, and here's the plan for the infrastructure and the schools to do it better.' But they are not doing that. They are coming in and saying, 'Put it all out there,' and they have got no plan at all. I would be very genuinely happy to take any Liberal member in this place on a tour of my electorate. I will introduce you to the school principals at some of these new schools that already have more than 1300 students in some of them. They are right at capacity. As opposed to –

**Richard Welch** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** If you were listening to my speech, Mr Welch, I have actually said we have built six new schools in this suburb. We are continuing to invest as hard as we can. But whilst we do that in the City of Boroondara, we have seen public school enrolment declining because people with kids cannot afford to live in that LGA. The Department of Education and Training has told a recent

committee inquiry that there are at least in excess of 10,000 spare spaces in terms of building capacity in the schooling system in Victoria's inner-ring suburbs. It is madness for any government to be saying that the only solution is to let them sit there and continue putting more and more and more money into the outer suburbs. There is always a place for our outer suburbs to grow, and we will continue to make the investments that we have, including building in Clyde North, where we have announced this year in the state budget three more schools for that area to meet that demand. We will continue to do that, but it is not sustainable to leave capacity sitting there whilst we put all these efforts and resources of government into building something new.

It does not make for a livable society either for us to keep growing endlessly, but it is what we see from the busybody planning vigilantes in the Liberal Party like Mr Davis, who seek out and destroy the housing aspirations of young Victorians. It is an affront, frankly, to the idea of liberalism, it is an affront to the idea of aspiration and it is an absolute smackdown to those few Liberals who dare to speak up, like Mr Mulholland did once. Does he believe in it? Does he believe in anything? He can tell us. It is like Senator Andrew Bragg, who has condemned the likes of his state colleagues, presumably including Mr Davis, for blocking housing. We have a serious problem. The status quo is not enough, and for too long the voices of these people have been drowned out because, for the most part, they do not have the time to go to repeated council planning meetings and to repeated community consultations. They are busy trying to make ends meet and trying to get to a point where they can invest in their first home. It is a very special moment for any young Australian, but they are denied that opportunity too often. This is a government that recognises it and sees the potential calamity of what that generational inequity could lead to for future Victorians. We are not prepared to accept that. The opposition in this place may well be prepared to accept it, but we are not. We are certainly not prepared to accept it when the driving force for this motion today appears to be to shore up the Liberal vote in Kew, in Hawthorn and in Brighton. We know who is holding the strings of power in this party – the NIMBY member for Brighton, indeed, who was protesting against housing being built. They are the ones pulling the strings of this party. The voices of Evan Mulholland and anyone else who once deigned to actually see sense on this are long gone, because the Liberal Party is not interested in you.

The worst part of this is as they say 'Put it all in the outer suburbs,' they are then going into those outer suburbs, as Mr Welch just said, and saying, 'Labor's not doing enough for you. Labor's not doing enough.' Well, we can debate that, we can argue that, we can talk about all the things that we are doing, but when you are going to inner-city suburbs and telling them that you will fix housing by putting it all in the outer suburbs, you are not then turning around to the outer suburbs and being honest about that. You are then going to them deceitfully and saying, 'Oh, it's all a Labor problem. We're going to make it better,' when you are actually going to make it worse. You are going to make suburbs like Clyde North, like Berwick, like Cranbourne and like Pakenham more unlivable by pushing all this housing out with no plan for infrastructure, no plan for services. As I said, we are struggling to keep pace as it is, despite the huge investments, but they want to pull all those stops away from that and put it on the outer suburbs because, 'Not in my backyard. We've got ours. Stuff you.' That is the attitude of Mr Davis, and that is what he brings into this place today.

This is a deeply, deeply cynical motion. It ignores facts straight in the face. I do not think Mr Davis has even read these codes, because of his comments about there being no tree canopy. He would know. I am sure he knows; he has read it. He is lying, because it does not say that there will be no tree canopy. There is a minimum of 10 to 20 per cent. You are lying to this chamber.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, Acting President, this is an offensive statement, and I ask that it be withdrawn.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** I uphold the point of order.

**Michael GALEA:** I withdraw calling Mr Davis a liar.

**David Davis:** On the point of order, Acting President, I ask that he withdraw unreservedly.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Mr Galea?

**Michael GALEA:** I withdraw unreservedly.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Thankfully, that concludes that time slot.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:18): Australia is facing a political crisis at the moment and, as Mr Galea pointed out, quite rightly, young people are mad. Millennials and Gen Z people are furious. They go to try and get a rental, and they see queues and prices that are out of their range. They try and buy a house – the median price for a house at the moment is approximately \$1 million in Victoria – and they see something that people in Victoria used to do in the past. Their generation cannot do it. Their generation cannot look forward to owning a home. Their generation is lucky if they can get a rental property, and they are mad.

On the demand side, when they hear about more and more and more immigration without building the infrastructure to deal with it, they get mad, and we have seen the political consequences of what is happening with that. The Liberal Party is facing annihilation over the issue. But on the other side as well, these younger people are becoming radicalised. We are seeing just how dangerous this is in Victoria at the moment. They are not looking to the Greens and what they are talking about with rental caps and stuff like that. On the radical left side, we have parties openly campaigning at the moment for expropriation of housing. They do not see things which are quite modest – though I see them as sort of crazy economic ideas – like rental caps and things like that that the Greens are proposing. The Socialist Party see the houses in Kew, Malvern, Brighton and these places, and they see wealth that they are promising to take away from those people. They just straight up want to expropriate it. One of the leaders of that party is openly encouraging squatting in houses and that sort of thing. So you have this radicalisation on the left and right, and it is because of housing.

The state Parliament cannot do much about immigration, although immigration levels are currently not sustainable and we do need to look at the immigration levels in Australia. But certainly on the supply side we can do a lot in Victoria. The Victorian Parliament can do a lot on supply. I agree with Dr Mansfield: I do not like everything that Labor are doing here, but they have at least acknowledged that there is a problem and that we do need vastly increased amounts of housing. One way to do it is to increase density in areas that already have infrastructure. As Mr Galea pointed out – and he is very well aware of the issues, as am I, in the South-East Metro area – they have had massive expansion in these estates, and they do not have the infrastructure to keep up. Earlier this morning we were talking about a documents motion for a railway station in Clyde. They do not have a railway station. The idea of catching a tram is fantasy, but they do not even have a railway station. They cannot live without cars in these areas. They do not have appropriate infrastructure. It is devastating for young people, and we need to act.

Standing in the way of housing – I have heard the Liberal Party talk about this being some sort of Stalinist thing: ‘What about property rights?’ What the Liberal Party is talking about is that people should be able to dictate what other people do with their property. That is not property rights, that is the exact opposite of property rights. It does seem to be something quite peculiar to the Liberal Party in Victoria, because recently I went to a conference, the national housing summit, on 30 April this year, and it was very informative. I was not able to stay there the whole day, but one of my staff was there the whole day. The Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness Senator Andrew Bragg seems to understand these issues very well. I do not like long quotes, but I am going to quote what he said to a question from the audience. The question was this:

What are you doing to deal with your state Liberal colleagues who are more NIMBY than YIMBY?

And this is how he responded:

I’ve been very disappointed with some of my state colleagues for embracing nimbyism. I think it is very selfish, and I think that for the millennial and younger generations, they are very aware that every time an

apartment building is vetoed, it's very bad for them, their generation and their children. I think people have to rise above their individual political interests here, and they have to find a way to get new housing approved.

Then he went on to say this:

I live in East Sydney, where there is a proposed station being built by the state government in which I would say that 75 to 80 per cent of the Liberal Party members in that area are against. But I have been very careful to support that, actually as has Kellie Sloane, who happens to be that state member for Vacluse, because we recognise how important it was to support infrastructure and housing in our own backyard, literally, because what kind of credibility would we have if we were against it?

He said:

I guess my message is that they just have to rise above any individual interest, and they've got to find a way to work with the communities to remind them that, if these houses don't get built, then the ageing people who largely reside in those LGAs will not be able to live near their family members. So in advancing years when they may not be able to drive or catch public transport, they may be very, very lonely people.

This is what the federal Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness from the Liberal Party said.

What is being proposed here is another huge problem. I have spoken many times and I agree with what the Liberal Party has been saying about taxes in Victoria. They are out of control, and it is a big problem for housing. But you know what, there is another problem that investors face. My vision is that Victoria becomes a very attractive investment destination, that people want to invest in Victoria, and do you know what people hate about investing in places? They hate uncertainty. Investors hate uncertainty. What the Liberal Party is trying to do here today is knock on the head planning scheme amendments that people have already started work on. People have already started work on these things, doing the planning, purchasing property, all of this sort of thing. What are those investors going to think if this goes through, if it is knocked on the head – which, as has been pointed out, actually is not even realistic. I do not know what sorts of promises the Liberal Party have been making to these communities, but as Dr Mansfield pointed out, they can simply just gazette it once again and nothing will happen. But if they were successful here and then knocked it all on the head, are those investors ever going to want to look at Victoria again? I doubt it, because they will just look at Victoria and they will say, 'Well, you know, we thought it was a good idea. We thought we were going to build these buildings and stuff and people were going to have new homes to live in. But then, you know, the upper house of state Parliament just came along and knocked the whole planning scheme on the head and we lost our money, people went bankrupt and we couldn't build anything.' It would be a disaster if that actually happened. It would be a disaster. We want more investors, not less. We want more investment in Victoria.

I just think that if you are going to block the development of housing – any house, anywhere – you need a really good moral case for doing that, because the consequences of not building housing are political fragmentation of the likes we have never seen before. Labor knows it is coming. That is why they are trying to do this. I have said I am not totally happy with what Labor is doing here, but at least they are doing something and trying to get more things built. If this fragmentation continues, and if this radicalisation of young people continues, we will be living in an Australia that none of us recognise anymore. That is a dangerous thing that I do not want, and I think many people in here do not want. I think that the people living in these areas do not want it either, because if we end up on a wild ride either to the left or right of politics, I think that the people that are complaining about these planning scheme amendments today might have bigger things to complain about.

The Libertarian Party will not be supporting this disallowance, but I urge the government to do whatever it can to remove barriers to housing and also, for goodness sake, look at the taxes in Victoria – make Victoria more attractive to invest in.

My biggest problem with all this is I am sceptical that any of this is actually going to get built. I have spoken to developers. The Liberal Party always comes out with these scare campaigns about dog boxes. No developers are building cheap apartments – they cannot make any money out of them. That

is what I am concerned about – that none of these developments will actually go ahead because no-one wants to invest in them. That is the big problem here. I think the government have got a lot more work to do if they actually want to attract investors and get any of these things built, because Victoria at the moment, unfortunately, is not a very attractive place to invest in anything, really. I think we need to make some big changes. I will not be supporting this disallowance motion.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:27): I am just going to make a few brief statements around this motion. What we are witnessing right now in Australia is the destruction of a city. It is akin to what happened in the 1960s when basically architectural vandals took control of the CBD and irreplaceably destroyed the nature of the amenity, the style and the beauty of our city. If it was not for some brave individuals in that period standing up and saying no, we would have lost the Royal Exhibition Building, amongst other things. There is a quality to this city –

*Members interjecting.*

**Richard WELCH**: I did not say that. If you were actually listening to what I was saying, I was not even going anywhere near that.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad)**: I will just call the chamber to order, please. Mr Welch, continue. Mr Batchelor, you are next.

**Richard WELCH**: One of the absolute key attributes of Melbourne having been such a successful city – particularly a successful multicultural city and in many respects an egalitarian city – is the equalising nature of the quality of our homes. Until recent times, no matter what background you came from, whether you were in the western suburbs or the eastern suburbs, whether you were an immigrant or locally born, you had a home. Everyone had their own driveway, they had their own backyard and they had a piece of Australia that was their own. I believe absolutely to my core that that was foundational in the success of this city. While Mr Galea says, ‘Well, the status quo is not satisfactory,’ well, you know what, the new status quo where that is no longer the standard for our city is a status quo created by the Labor government over 20 of the last 24 years in government. They caused this problem, and now, having caused this problem, they come in with their size 12 clown feet to say, ‘We’ll solve the problem with even worse urban planning solutions.’

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Richard WELCH**: Spare me. Their justification is housing, but we all know that due to the tax system, which Mr Limbrick is totally correct about, this will not produce affordable housing. It mathematically cannot. That is why these buildings are not getting built. If you really wanted the new housing, if you really wanted that supply, you would have to reform the tax. If you really wanted new housing and you were not just trying to get revenue from rezoning, you would remove the windfall gains tax.

There is all this stuff about urban sprawl. Well, within the confines of our city there is endless Crown land, often owned by councils, that is differently zoned, and if they rezone it to residential to provide the supply, they are subject to windfall gains tax. So do not pretend you are here to create housing, because the core mechanism of supply is that the houses themselves can be built in economically viable quantities, and you are not willing to do that because you need the money. You need the money because you have misdirected our capital to non-productive purposes. You have misdirected our capital. And while you denigrate those in the outer suburbs – they are not fringe suburbs, they are new communities that have been planted and are absolutely entitled to the same infrastructure as every other part of Melbourne. If you had not redirected the capital to these white elephants like the Suburban Rail Loop, if you had not let \$15 billion go –

*Members interjecting.*

**Richard WELCH**: I will not shout if you do not interrupt.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad):** Just bring the level down a bit so that the people in the gallery do not need earmuffs.

**Richard WELCH:** If you had not misdirected this state's precious capital into these miscreant programs, such as the Suburban Rail Loop, if you had not bled \$15 billion to corruption, if you had not wound out our debt to \$200 billion, to a point where we are paying \$10 billion a year in interest, you would not need the windfall gains tax, and then the problem would be solved. We would be able to put the resources where they need to be and maintain quality of life for all of Victoria. But as it is, you want to infill, as you call it, into the middle suburbs and completely change their character. You are doing so without a skerrick of a plan to uplift the social infrastructure that goes with it. Where are the new schools in the inner city? Where are the new hospitals? Where is the new open space? Where is the parking? Where are any of the resources you say will add to quality of life? It will not. It is an absolute measure of the poorness of this urban planning.

Let us be perfectly clear: we are going to end up with the worst of both worlds. We will not have the resources for the communities in the outer suburbs who deserve it, but we will be overcrowded in the inner suburbs, with no new infrastructure for them. So we will lose and lose, we will still be in debt and young people still will not be able to afford housing. We will have destroyed a beautiful city, not because we could not have done it better, not because there was not available land, not because there was not capital but because we chose to use all of these precious resources in the wrong way. It is this government of 20 of the last 24 years that will have done it.

**Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:34):** We are here today in this month's episode of the Liberal Party standing against people getting houses. It is not the first time we have seen this show, but the stories remain the same. Members opposite continue to, I would say argue, but I suspect the correct word is 'bloviate', against young Victorians having the capacity to buy a home in the communities they grew up in, in the communities that they love, near their families, near jobs, near schools. What we are seeing again is an attempt by the Liberal Party to block planning scheme changes that are going to create new homes for more Victorians. We saw it last year in fact. In May last year we were here in what can only be described as the first version of this episode. Mr Davis brought in a motion to revoke the planning scheme amendments that we had moved at the time, including VC267, which was the townhouse code. He got up and told us at that time how terrible it would be if these planning scheme amendments were not revoked, if they were allowed to stand. Similar to the tenor of the contribution from Mr Welch, they got up and they told us that it would not make any difference, but it has.

The changes that we brought in last year, the changes that were in the codes last year that the Liberal Party attempted to block, are making a difference. In fact today we have data that shows that permits under the townhouse code, which the Liberal Party tried to block last year, tried to revoke last year, have jumped from more than 2000 to more than 3100 planning permits issued in just one year. Applications are surging under the townhouse code, jumping from 4800 to 7000 since the townhouse code was introduced last year. Last year the Liberal Party tried to block those planning provisions and applications. They failed, thankfully, and applications have surged.

Here we are again this year: Mr Davis bloviating against progress, Mr Welch continuing his crusade against people living, heaven forbid, in an apartment, and the same thing is going to happen. They are going to stand up and they are going to rail against the opportunity for more Victorians to live in suburbs close to where they grew up, close to their family, with good schools and great parks. They are going to tell you that the sky is going to fall in. The Chicken Little act that we see from those opposite will happen again and again and again.

We know that what Labor is doing in terms of reforming our planning scheme so that more homes can be built and more people have the opportunity to live in communities that they love is going to deliver housing outcomes and going to deliver homes for more Victorians. That is what is most important in this debate: how our votes in this place today help younger Victorians in particular but

all Victorians find somewhere that they can live in the communities that they love. That is what is driving Labor's planning reforms. That is what is absolutely motivating this government. Instead of being blocked from housing, instead of being priced out of suburbs that they want to live in and instead of forcing development onto an urban fringe which struggles to keep up with the pace of growth in terms of infrastructure, despite all of the investments that this Labor government is making in terms of building schools – and Mr Galea has gone through that in great detail – that is the alternative that the Liberal Party wants to put forward.

What Labor wants to do is make sure we have got more homes being built in our inner and middle-ring suburbs and that there are opportunities in our growth corridors but that we have got a balance across the system and that we take advantage of the infrastructure that generations of Victorians have built up, whether it be roads, whether it be trains, whether it be trams or whether it be schools, and where they are under capacity at the moment, as many schools are in the very suburbs that are affected by the revocation motion today, that those schools are filled with new prep classes into the future, because at the moment they are struggling for enrolments. I know there are others that want to participate in this debate, so I will leave a bit of time for that. What we want is for more Victorians to have a home, and the Liberals want to block it.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (15:40): I am going to have to really cut down my comments, given the limited amount of time that is available. Could I perhaps just start out by endorsing the contribution from Dr Mansfield. We have had the pleasure of working, through the committees and various other things, on these issues, and I think we are of a very similar mindset as to how this should move forward. Can I say at the outset that Legalise Cannabis is absolutely cognisant of the absolute priority of providing affordable housing that people can actually get into in locations that are appropriately serviced by infrastructure, public transport and health services.

The government's approach to the planning problem seems to be primarily to simply push aside councils and push aside concerned residents, as though the simple act of deregulating the process of approvals will somehow make things happen. The reality is that this is not simply muddle-headed; it is in many cases counterproductive. Mr Batchelor talks about the huge growth of townhouse applications. What is not discussed is the fact that those applications are not in inner and middle-ring suburbs. They are overwhelmingly on the outskirts, in the very suburbs that Mr Galea quite correctly identifies as being overwhelmed. So not only do you not achieve the outcome, you make it worse.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**David ETTERS HANK**: Yes, I have read the motion. Thank you for that. Good share. The reality is that what we have seen are a range of amendments that basically serve to undermine public safety and environmental standards.

**Ryan Batchelor**: Public safety? How?

**David ETTERS HANK**: Planners are precluded from taking into account flood plains under the legislation that came through last year, as Mr Batchelor is aware. What we are seeing is a situation where the government will not recognise the flaws in this legislation and instead simply reduces this down to a 'NIMBYs versus YIMBYs' debate. All nuance is stripped out of the discussion. I am not suggesting that one side or the other is better, to be honest. It is deeply frustrating that we do not seem to be able to have a sensible discussion about population or to have a sensible discussion about growth, and the fabric of our city for the next half a century is being shaped by a half-arsed approach premised upon free market economics and 'fingers crossed'. At the same time, I am very disturbed that there is a perception that has been given to the community that we can simply pass this disallowance motion and it is all over, red rover, the problem is fixed. Manifestly that is wrong and that is inadequate, and I think it is gratuitous and incorrect to tell the community that that is the way forward. In closing, I would just like to say that whilst we support the concerns that have been expressed, we will not be supporting this motion, because it simply does not achieve its stated objectives.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:43): This is an important motion. It is true that we are in a position in opposition in this chamber where we do not control what the government says and does or its terrible plans across the city. But that does not mean we cannot do anything, and it does not mean we cannot send a clear signal about what the chamber and the Victorian community, and the Melbourne community in particular, feel about these issues. People do not want these high-rise, high-density zones forced upon them, they do not want their suburbs being destroyed and they do not want the undemocratic approach which is inherent in the way the government has gone about these matters.

Today the cat is out of the bag: 150 so-called activity centres – high-rise, high-density zones – is and was the government's plan. The government are now running a thousand miles away from this as the journalists start to put it to them: why did your documents say 150 zones were needed to get to the 800,000? They said you need the 150, according to the officials, to get to the 800,000. They are not getting to their 800,000, so the government went after the 150 zones. The government is running away from that today. They are running away at a million miles an hour, because they know 150 zones across Melbourne leave very little of the city left. 150 of these zones leave very few suburbs that are not run over in a swathe, having these massive towers up to 20 storeys and beyond put on them without council approval, without community approval and without the slightest scintilla of proper consultation. The community says, 'No. We don't want the 60 zones. We don't want the 150 zones. We don't want our democratic rights torn away, and we don't want to lose our heritage in suburbs. We don't want to lose the vegetation, the ambience of our suburbs and the livability.'

The state government has blocked housing all across the city. They have blocked it on government land across the city. They have blocked it on the edge of the city, with slow processes with the precinct structure plans. They have blocked it on sites like Fishermans Bend. Why on earth, 14 years after the change of government, have they got virtually no new housing at Fishermans Bend? That is entirely on Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan and their governments; it is their fault. They actually could have got development at Fishermans Bend in a sensible way, in a pragmatic way, in a way that actually protected communities and built a community in that location. I use that as just one example, and there are many of these across the city. Instead of that, what they have done is they have gone for these high-rise, high-density zones and forced development, overriding councils, bulldozing communities and destroying suburbs and the heritage involved.

Mr Limbrick is correct about the tax. There is no question that the state government has jacked up tax after tax, 66 new and expanded taxes, many of them on property and laying out huge new costs on property, and that makes the properties unaffordable for young people. So it is a bit rich of Labor members here to say the Liberal Party is blocking this or doing that. No, we are actually saying that development is possible – sensible development, practical development. But if you layer tax upon tax upon tax, you make it unaffordable, and that is what young people are finding now. My children and the children of many in this chamber actually confront this, and they understand that the challenge is there. But those taxes have been put on by Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan. They are the taxes that are making things unaffordable. And those who also do not want to stand up and say very clearly and very strongly that this is wrong, I think –

**Harriet Shing:** Housing is more affordable here than elsewhere.

**David DAVIS:** I tell you what, you can run out and tell that to all the young people, that it is cheap here. I know it is not cheap, and I know that those taxes are biting.

What I also say is that the Greens and the minor parties who wish to oppose these steps, I think, misread this. I think they misunderstand that the community is wanting a clear lead. It is no good for councils or MPs or others in leadership positions to not stand up and not oppose the Labor Party's arrogant takeover of our suburbs. We actually need to stand up. I have watched this now – I watched it at Kew the other night, and I was shocked that the council was not strong enough to stand up and fight for our community.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (16):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (23):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.****Public transport**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:55): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) in a cost-of-living crisis, free public transport has been good for Victoria;
  - (2) Victoria still needs significant public transport improvements, including in outer suburban areas and regional Victoria;
  - (3) these improvements could be funded by taxing the major banks and big corporations;
- and calls on the government to make public transport permanently free and frequent.

I am here this afternoon to mourn the loss of free public transport in Victoria. It has been a glorious couple of months, and it has been so good for Victoria to enjoy free public transport. We were so pleased to see the government take up this idea, which has saved Victorians so much money during a period when we have been facing a fuel crisis – which I note is ongoing – and a cost-of-living crisis which is ongoing.

When Trump and Netanyahu's illegal strikes on Iran first sent petrol and diesel prices through the roof, the Greens did call on the government to make public transport free for the month of April and to use that month to start implementing the longer term fixes that would help more people access those free fares and avoid paying a fortune at the petrol pump – and to run trains and trams more frequently at off peak times, when there is plenty of travel demand and plenty of capacity on the tracks but services are currently much less frequent. We called on them to reform the bus network into a grid of frequent routes that serves everyone in established suburbs and growth corridors in Melbourne and in regional Victoria. We called on them to roll out more safe cycling infrastructure to enable more people to leave the car at home and ride their bike instead and to support the switch from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles, which we know are cheaper to run at the best of times but especially so during a fuel crisis. We were so pleased that the government saw sense in the suggestion and agreed to make public transport free for April, and since then we have actually seen over the period of time that we have had free PT available in Victoria passenger numbers returning to pre-COVID levels, which is fantastic. April was the busiest month in more than six years, and there was a more than doubling of V/Line passenger numbers on the weekends. It has been a huge success story for Victoria, and that is why we are putting this motion today, calling on the government to keep public transport permanently free and frequent in Victoria.

Those who could access free public transport have been able to save a lot of money over this period, which has been a welcome relief in a time where those high petrol and diesel prices have just been adding to and compounding the ongoing cost-of-living crisis Victorians have been facing for years now. For those who are already taking public transport the ability to leave the Myki at home represented a saving of \$220 a month, and for someone who was switching from a car to commuting by public transport those savings would have been even higher. Based on the RACV's *Car Running Costs 2022* report, a middle-of-the-range Subaru Forester would cost about \$250 a month on average in fuel, servicing and tyres, and that is just in normal times. With petrol surging 30 per cent recently,

it could have been more like a \$300 saving to leave the car in the garage for a month. This is a real cost-of-living success story – real relief delivered to the Victorian community as well as all of the emissions reductions and congestion-busting benefits that have flowed from this initiative.

The success of this initiative, though, has actually also highlighted a number of areas that we really know illustrate need for further improvement. There are failures that have been ongoing in PT, and the period of free transport has actually brought a lot of discussion around community need to the fore. For so many people across the state, switching a car trip to a public transport trip actually still is not an option. Some are living in housing estates that, several years after people have moved in, do not even have a bus available. Some live in well-established suburbs that do have buses, but they run in meandering patterns through the back streets, not taking direct routes to where people want to get to. And some have services that, for example, only run once an hour or do not run late enough into the evenings, or even do not have a service at all, particularly during weekend periods. The failure to provide alternatives to driving has locked so many Victorians into car dependence, and in some households multiple car dependence, with all of the costs that come with that. This was an issue well before the current fuel crisis, forcing families to own, insure, service and fuel multiple cars just to get around and meet their basic needs, which as we have said, is expensive at the best of times and even worse at the moment. This is without mentioning the way that car dependence locks communities into traffic congestion and into planet-wrecking carbon emissions. We know that emissions from transport are the fastest growing source of emissions in Victoria, and there is all of the pollution that flows from car dependence as well, with localised particulates and noxious gases that can have an impact on people's lung health and contribute to rates of things like childhood asthma.

Public transport is an essential service, just like health care, just like education and just like our emergency services. Just as the COVID crisis highlighted longstanding failures and gaps in our public health system, this fuel shock has brought to the surface the areas that we really still need to address – the systemic failures of government after government to provide these growth suburbs and regions with essential public transport services. Some Victorians have even seen their experience get worse over these last few months. Particularly on V/Line, we have seen trains, which prior to the free travel period were already just barely coping with passenger numbers, reach the point of overflowing, with more demand from passengers but no more supply of services from the government. In many cases, this was actually completely predictable and foreseeable. In Melbourne's west V/Line trains have been pulling double duty on the Ballarat line, serving regional passengers as well as suburban passengers, and that has caused ongoing issues with crowding. Regional and suburban passengers and councils and advocacy groups have already been raising the alarm about this and crying out for years for the line to be electrified to Melton to ease the pressure, but the government still keeps kicking the can down the road, delaying this project year after year. We have now seen some commitment only to feasibility and planning. Really, that project has been in the works for years and years. It is time to get on with it.

**David Ettershank** interjected.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thirteen years, Mr Ettershank, not that anyone was counting. We see that this is a story that is repeated, unfortunately, across our regions – places like Wyndham Vale and Donnybrook, growth suburbs all around Melbourne that have been shouting for years and in some cases decades about the need for metro trains to be extended and electrified, but the government has failed to listen to those calls. April saw that pot that has been simmering boil over, with already crowded trains becoming so full that people were left behind on the platform. I had a personal experience of this on the first or second day of the public transport free period where a bus wonderfully went sailing past saying, 'Sorry, bus full.' I raised with the minister the question of how we were capturing the data during the period that we had free public transport. We know what passenger numbers are from our regular passenger data, but the unmet demand for people who have been left stranded at the stops – I do not know if we will ever have an accurate picture of what that was during this period.

It is also worth acknowledging that the government has made really positive announcements during this period about public transport services, which are very welcome, and this year's budget included an upgrade from 30- to 20-minute frequencies on the Belgrave, Lilydale and Glen Waverley lines on weekday evenings and similar upgrades on the Mernda and Hurstbridge lines on weekends as well as delivering the nine trains a day that the recently completed Shepparton line upgrade enabled. It also included a smattering of upgrades to individual bus routes. These upgrades are incredibly welcome and answer community demands that have been loudly voiced for many, many years, but they still fall well short of the transformative change we need to see if we are going to seriously reduce car dependence in this state, reduce people's fuel bills and reduce our transport emissions quickly enough to meet our state's own emissions reduction goals. Business-as-usual tinkering will not meet the moment here. There is so much work to do, and even in this moment of an actual fuel crisis, I feel the government is not responding to the crisis that it presents. There is so much work to do, and while it is welcome that this temporary fix has been put in place by the government, we need to be making those systemic investments with a sense of urgency.

The lack of urgency is unfortunately familiar when it comes to getting transport up to scratch, because some members of our community we know live near tram services that are frequent and direct but they still cannot access them, free or otherwise, because the government continues to fail in its legal duty to make those services accessible to people of all ages and all abilities. I have spoken before about the shame of our failure to meet the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) requirements, which required all train stations and tram stops to comply with accessibility standards by 31 December 2022. Nearly 1200 stops, about three-quarters of the network, still do not meet these standards. It is just a shame. At the end of the last year this government was patting itself on the back for having built 100 level access tram stops. But that is over about 11 years in office, and that is an average of maybe just over nine a year – come on, guys. At that rate it is going to take us more than a century to upgrade all 1200. It is just not okay for folks of different abilities, who have been campaigning for key routes to be made accessible for years and years, election after election, to be waiting for commitments to be realised, and they are still waiting. Worst of all, this government is actively now building more noncompliant stops. There is an example currently of consolidating multiple tram stops in the North Melbourne area to cope with the longer G-class trams. But when the government is building these new stops, they will still be at ground level. They are brand new stops to serve brand new accessible trams, but they will not be providing level boarding opportunities for people accessing tram routes in this area. These are not old stops that are awaiting upgrade. These are new stops that are being done in different locations that do not meet modern standards. I think that is appalling.

I do not understand why accessibility has not been incorporated as a business-as-usual requirement. It is not just for folks in wheelchairs and those with pushers; accessible trams help all of us. Platform stops are obviously crucial for people who are relying on wheelchairs or mobility scooters to get around, but they are also important for people who can walk but have difficulty taking large steps up or down. They are a huge help to people pushing prams or carrying heavy bags or just heading to the market with their trolley, and they provide a huge safety benefit by protecting passengers from passing cars, which is something that I still to this day have issues with. Even in Melbourne, a place where we are all very used to trams, you still get times in traffic when a car will speed past and it is just not safe. Platform stops reduce that risk to pedestrians. They can also help us all and they can help the tram network run faster and more reliably by reducing dwell times at stops, because people can get on and off more quickly and easily. We have got these upgrades that are not only legally required by the DDA and not only crucial for people with disabilities to get around with independence and dignity but also hugely beneficial for the wider travelling public, and still the government cannot bring itself to implement them with urgency. Honestly, we are so far behind where we should be. We have got ground to make up.

As the end of April approached and it became clear that the Strait of Hormuz crisis would be keeping petrol and diesel prices high for the foreseeable future, we called on the government to make free public transport permanent. Other states are not walking away from this. Tasmania have extended the

life of their free public transport for a whole nother year until July 2027, and of course Queensland has 50-cent fares. I think we can take it up to the Apple Isle. I think that we should aim high in Victoria. We have got great resources here. And of course Queensland's 50-cent fares are a permanent measure. But the government has announced that Victoria's free public transport has come to an end at the end of May and half-price fares, somewhat cynically, are here until the end of the year – just after, of course, the election. It is a quintessentially Labor policy: rather than bold action to seriously address the problem, it is another half-measure designed to take the heat out of the issue for just long enough to cling on to power. And I will note that the conditions that supported the introduction of free public transport, namely the fuel crisis and the cost-of-living crisis, have not abated; they are continuing for Victorians.

One of the great things about this period of free public transport is that it has opened up this wider conversation about public transport priorities, and those who do not have adequate services and who have not been able to access free PT have quite rightly made their voices heard during this period. But some have suggested that it has to be one or the other – we can either have better PT or we can have free PT, but we cannot have both. In truth, it is actually just a question of priorities and choices. If we look in the transport budget, the massive, destructive, polluting North East Link toll road has blown its budget repeatedly, and that is a project that will not achieve its stated objectives. It will not reduce traffic – it will in fact just induce more people to drive, and it will create a tidal wave of traffic that will flow down the Eastern Freeway and slam into Hoddle Street in peak hours. But this government still chooses to spend money on it – billions of dollars in fact. What started as a \$10 billion project has blown out to \$16 billion and then to \$26 billion. But still this government chooses to spend our public infrastructure money on it. The cost of this one poorly conceived toll road could fund free public transport in Victoria for 25 years, and the government is choosing not to do that. Outside of transport, this government is choosing to spend \$395 million and counting on luxury corporate box upgrades at the grand prix for their ultrawealthy corporate mates. Labor could instead choose to spend \$245 million on duplicating the Upfield line, and they would have \$150 million left to spend on running extra trains on the new tracks.

But it is not just a question of how we cut up the pie and what we choose to spend money on; it is a question of whether this state chooses to use its powers to make big corporations pay their fair share. In Victoria, there is a 15 per cent online gambling tax on the revenue made from Victorian customers, some of which goes to propping up the horseracing industry and supporting more gambling. But we could raise our tax to 25 per cent to match the ACT's version, and we could make sure that all the revenue goes to things that would actually benefit the community. We could also double the existing tax on casino table games and increase taxes on pokies to 75 per cent, which altogether would raise nearly \$2 billion a year. We could also impose a modest levy on the major banks. Australian banks are some of the most profitable in the world, and a modest 0.1 per cent quarterly levy on their Victorian liabilities would help ensure that they pay their fair share of tax and raise an extra \$3 billion-plus a year. We could also double the existing state royalties on coal and gas, raising an extra roughly \$80 million a year, while also providing an important price signal on these polluting fossil fuel projects.

If we tax the big corporations, the gambling corporations, the big banks and the fossil fuel industry, we can afford free public transport and so much more. Maybe we would not have to be pulling up our state's public housing. We can afford to extend our public transport to new growth suburbs. We can afford to slash waiting times by running services more often. We can afford a transport system that is better for the environment and more affordable for everyone. That is the vision that the Greens want to see pursued in this state, and we call on the government to make the big banks and corporations pay their fair share and to take care of our community by making public transport permanently free and frequent.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:13): I appreciate the opportunity to talk on this motion, and I acknowledge Ms Copsy for raising what is certainly a very interesting topic to debate in the Parliament today. It was a fairly wideranging contribution in some moments, but it is an

important thing for us to be talking about. At the outset I would also acknowledge, as Ms Copsey referred to, the significant further investments this government has recently announced, and I appreciate the acknowledgement of that. Indeed it was the state Labor government that came out with the very bold policy, in light of an emerging crisis, to provide public transport free for the state of Victoria for a month and then for a second month. With the ongoing understanding and awareness that, as has been referred to, we are in a very difficult situation with the Strait of Hormuz in the Middle East through a war that was not of any Australian government's making – a situation that we are currently in – we do have a responsibility as governments to do everything that we can to manage those risks and do our bit to support Victorians.

That is exactly why, as with last year – in fact even more so this year – this year's state budget is a cost-of-living budget. There are ongoing half-price fares until at least the end of the year, and there is a 20 per cent rebate on car and light vehicle registrations for up to two vehicles per individual as well. These are significant reforms. I will not go into other areas that we have already spoken about in previous days, but these are significant cost-of-living measures that will help and are helping Victorian families. We have seen the incredible take-up of these services and of these reforms that the government has brought in. I do want to acknowledge that we are in a particularly unusual and fast-changing situation, and it is because of that uncertainty that the government has decided to extend that free public transport for at least this seven-month period. Indeed we will continue to monitor and evaluate the success or otherwise of every initiative, including what the oil situation is at the end of the year, and whether a continuation or whether other approaches may need to be looked at at that time. I note of course, though, that we already do have some of the cheapest public transport in the country when it comes to long-distance travel, thanks to the regional fare cap, meaning that the cost of travel from Melbourne to Mallacoota or Mildura is the same as going from Melbourne to Malvern. It is significant indeed, and it is very important that public transport be affordable and accessible to Victorians.

Let us have a look, though, at the revenue output of this and what this proposal would actually look like. Based off extrapolations in the budget papers of the half-price public transport initiative, we are looking at an approximate annual hit to the budget of just over \$950 million each and every year. It is a significant hit to the budget, and that would be something that indeed would have to be filled in from somewhere. I understand the point that Ms Copsey is trying to make, but what that would then effectively do is put public transport in competition with health services and with education services. We already do subsidise public transport services, as we rightly should, because every person on public transport means one less car on the road and more equity and access for all Victorians. The benefits from public transport are huge and certainly worth the subsidy, but having that revenue basis as well does play an important role.

It also plays an important role when you are looking at improving services, because – and Ms Copsey did touch on the argument that I was going to make here – the most effective way that we can drive that mode shift is by improving services. Certainly we can see great benefits and indeed in lots of different cases increased patronage as a result of free public transport over the past couple of months, but that is an extraordinarily large investment for what is a reasonably modest jump in patronage. Compare that to putting that same equivalent figure into services: the resulting patronage you would see would be extraordinary. Every dollar that we can contribute will help towards that. Likewise, for every passenger that joins an existing service, the overall subsidy per passenger reduces, creating that positive cycle, that virtuous cycle of investment in public transport, driving increased patronage, driving a lower subsidy per passenger and driving more space, more budget and more revenue to fund further improved services, and that is only a good thing.

There is a case for having public transport that is certainly cheap but not necessarily free, especially when we focus on the key thing that evidence and research from Australia and from around the world, whether you look at academics like Jarrett Walker or the late Paul Mees, and from public transport experts tell you: frequency is freedom, frequency is key, and that is the way that we can unlock public

transport access in our inner cities, in our suburbs and in our regions. Let me provide an example: if you live in Newbridge Boulevard in Clyde North in my electorate, a relatively recent new estate just off Clyde Road, you have got good access to Cranbourne with the 897 and the 898 – those east–west routes. You also have good access to Berwick with the Clyde Road bus, the 888 service. Currently that bus runs every hour. If you work in the thriving centre in Berwick and you live in this area of Clyde North, you can easily catch the 888 bus. But depending on what time your shift finishes, if you are then finding yourself waiting half an hour, 45 minutes or 50 minutes at a bus stop in Berwick to get home, you are probably not going to get the bus. You are probably going to drive, even if it costs you more, even if it means you spend more time in traffic. But if you take that investment in making public transport free and put that into service improvements – make it, for example, every 20 minutes – then that option becomes a lot more viable, and of course public transport is still much cheaper than driving even under normal circumstances. I am very happy to say, thanks to the investments in this year's budget, that is exactly what is happening. The 888 service is being increased from an hourly service to a 20-minute service, so in that particular scenario you will certainly get the benefit of that frequency, which leads to that freedom to use public transport, to leave the car at home and indeed, for many households, to not need as many vehicles, which again can only be a good thing, having that freedom of choice.

There is a very strong argument for making public transport cheap. There is a very, very strong argument for improving services. But to make it free does become a more difficult question, because we are then making every single investment in public transport a competition: do we invest in an increased bus service in Clyde North or in increasing frequencies on the Belgrave line? Both are very worthwhile things to do. Do we invest in that under a free public transport scenario, when we are not going to get that increased revenue return from booming patronage as a result of the improved services? It might sound very easy to say, 'Yes, we should do it now.' But if you are having to make that consideration in comparison with 'Do we improve funding for hospital services?' or 'Do we build this new school that we need to build?' that is where it starts to put public transport improvements at a disadvantage and could lead to a future government deprioritising public transport service improvements at the altar of it being free.

Indeed there is a lot of work that has been done, there is a lot of work that we are very excited about and there is always more work to do, but we know that currently access to high-quality public transport is available to many Victorians but disproportionately in those inner-city suburbs of Melbourne, where we are trying to build more houses – but that was the previous debate. There is not an equity argument for providing free services to some and not to others. The focus needs to be on lifting up the access of all Victorians, particularly those in metropolitan urban areas and even town centres in regional Victoria. Lifting their access to services up – that must be the focus. Free PT may have some benefits in doing that, but it will not achieve the mode shift that we need to see. It will not do it nearly as effectively as improving services will.

I have not touched on point (3) of the motion, and I am not entirely sure of the detail or how constitutional it would be to tax the major banks and big corporations to fund this. But without going too far into the magic pudding argument, there was also a comment about the state of Tasmania. Tasmania is a beautiful state. Their bus network is not exactly what –

**A member** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes. It is not as beautiful as Victoria, but it is a beautiful state. Their bus network is not exactly what you would call expansive. It seems to be not very usable at all, even in inner-city Hobart, let alone any question of intercity bus services or rail services or trams – forget about it. I am off topic, but I believe they are looking at doing some bus reform too, so hopefully they will do some proper work in improving Hobart's bus network. But certainly it is not an equivalent comparison when you compare it to a state like Victoria, where we have the world's largest tram network and by far and away the most effective regional rail network in Australasia and where we have a government

currently that is making the investments in not just the rail infrastructure but the rail, tram and bus services that this growing state desperately needs.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:23): I rise to speak on Ms Copsey's motion. It is quite an interesting motion for today, but it is a Wednesday, so you often get interesting debates going on in this chamber, and I am not one to miss interesting debates. It is on the issue of public transport, and over the last 12 years my electorate has absolutely been starved of decent public transport. It has been absolutely ignored, abandoned and overlooked by the Labor Party. Even when we were promised so many benefits from the Metro Tunnel, what did we see? Those were scaled right back by about 70 per cent from what was promised, through their axing of the turnback at Gowrie station, through their axing of the turnback at Essendon station, which means the good people on the Upfield line and the Craigieburn line miss out, because we went \$5 billion over budget on that. And I did not hear a whimper from the members for Northern Metropolitan in this place or the Labor members in the northern suburbs in the other place about why the government cut those important turnbacks, which would have delivered frequency on those lines. We have more commuters on the Craigieburn line than the Frankston line, yet we have double the wait times. And what is the difference between the two lines? That would be marginal seats. So we get this political exercise from the government.

I found it interesting in the previous debate that Mr Galea said that they were barely keeping up with infrastructure in the growth areas. Maybe where the Clyde rail line ends and it is just an empty track with some long grass, they can put a plaque from Jacinta Allan for \$70,000 that says 'Barely keeping up – from your Labor government', because that would be quite accurate. Then we see – and it was mentioned before in the government's investments – the government changing the rules of the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund so that it does not even need to be spent in the area now that it is collected from. The growth areas deliver the most revenue through developer taxes and stamp duty into government coffers but somehow keep getting absolutely screwed. They keep getting absolutely screwed, whereby GAIC funds, instead of funding infrastructure like they were meant to, are now actually funding things that were previously funded out of consolidated revenue, like bus services. The government is claiming all these wins from bus services that they are taking directly from GAIC instead of consolidated revenue. GAIC was meant to be used for roundabouts, town halls, community centres, maternal and child health centres, road duplications and connections between estates, those kinds of long-lasting infrastructure – except the government is consistently raiding GAIC to subsidise things that would otherwise need to be paid for.

Mr Galea said that free public transport would be, in the long term, in competition with other things that they have to fund, like schools and like hospitals. I remind Mr Galea that, as we know through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process and questions on notice, the Suburban Rail Loop East is now costing almost one-fifth of the government's entire state capital program for the next four years. That includes schools. That includes hospitals. So when Mr Galea says that free public transport would be in competition with all those other services, this massive white elephant of the Cheltenham to Box Hill line is already in competition with it. They have got this ridiculous funding model. We heard brand new information from the Treasurer yesterday, which I know Ms Shing would have never revealed, of the government's supposed 40-year loan for the up-front cost of \$11.5 billion, through their value capture mechanism, would be funded including interest. Now, if you take the Treasury Corporation of Victoria yield for long-term loans, about 6.25 per cent, that means the cost of the interest on the value capture component – \$11.5 billion, let us be conservative with that – is over \$28 billion, which means a supposed one-third of the project is almost \$40 billion alone. This is what this government is signing us up for. We will never be able to do SRL North. The government says, 'You can't compare SRL East without SRL North.' We will never be able to do that given the value capture component is going to cost almost \$40 billion. If we are signed up to one-fifth of our state capital program for the next four years, it is going to be a greater amount than that for the next 40 years for one Cheltenham to Box Hill line.

I look at my electorate, and I look at the boom gate failures at Donnybrook Road – it is stuffing up almost weekly. There are failures for the good people of Tarneit, for example, who cannot get on at that station. We have the member for Tarneit packing his suitcases to come to this chamber while his residents literally cannot get on a train. V/Line says it is the fastest growing regional rail service. It is only the fastest growing because this government has promised election after election to electrify rail lines and has not. Old regional country towns that had a V/Line going through them have had tens of thousands of homes built around the outside of them. From those same homes the government have taken all the stamp duty revenue and all the developer taxes, and they are ploughing it towards a train line white elephant in the eastern suburbs. They are ploughing it towards their \$200 billion debt pile, for which we are paying every day over a million dollars an hour just to service the interest on that debt from the wasteful spending that they have racked up. It is an outrage.

I speak of the Donnybrook level crossing. My constituent Lani wrote to me just a few weeks ago to tell me her story:

...a family in our community faced a medical emergency involving their one year old child. An ambulance was dispatched from Craigieburn but was blocked for more than 30 minutes because the boom gates were stuck down. This is not a hypothetical risk – this is a real incident where a child's life was put in danger. Next time, the outcome could be far worse.

I have heard of stories from these boom gates where children were left outside of their primary school, like Mickleham South and other schools up in Kalkallo and Mickleham, for an over an hour because their parents were stuck behind a level crossing that keeps breaking down. Yet this government wants to invest in a brand new line that does not stack up. As I have just explained, even if it builds the first section, it can never build SRL North; it just will not happen based on the economics of how much they have consigned all Victorians to in the first stage. As I said, the value capture component alone is almost \$40 billion. The Treasurer admitted last night in this chamber that it is going to be much more than \$11.5 billion; it is going to be almost \$40 billion just for that section. The whole section of SRL East is going to cost almost \$60 billion. That is frightening for one project.

You have people in Clyde neglected, and you have people in Donnybrook and Wallan and Beveridge, which does not even have a train station since Labor closed it, neglected. Melton and Wyndham Vale – what is this now, the third or fourth election that Labor will take to the good people of Melton and Wyndham Vale that they are going to electrify their train line? The punters have figured this government out. This government does not care about decent public transport for people in our growth areas and our regions. If they did, they would be scrapping the vanity project, their Premier's vanity project, of the Suburban Rail Loop and actually funding decent infrastructure. Ms Copsey mentioned accessible tram stops for places like Sydney Road. How long have the government sat on that for? Because again, it is funding crap projects that no-one asked for instead of projects that actually matter.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (16:33): I would personally like to thank Ms Copsey for bringing this motion before the chamber. Free public transport has been good for Victorians in this cost-of-living crisis. However, as has been observed, the benefits have not been evenly distributed, because not all Victorians have any access to public transport. For many of my constituents, any public transport at all would be good. Long before this latest cost-of-living crisis was brought on by fuel increases due to the war in Iran, people in the outer west and other growth areas were struggling to pay for transport. The lack of affordable, accessible, reliable public transport in these areas isolates residents from the types of facilities and amenities that most Melburnians take for granted and indeed many of us can simply walk to. If you are living in a suburb where the nearest place to buy a carton of milk or a tube of toothpaste is 8 kilometres away, owning more than one car is not a luxury; it is a necessity and certainly a big expense you could do without.

So obviously they did not benefit from free public transport, and the government's discounted car registration is simply not equivalent to discounted public transport. The standard passenger vehicle registration for the outer metro region is \$871 per year, so with a 20 per cent discount a driver will save about \$174 in rego costs for the year. Two-car households would save \$348 per annum – and of

course they are still paying for fuel – whereas a household that can access public transport would have saved \$228 per month during the months of free public transport. Combined with the half-price fares in operation for the rest of the year, we are talking about a saving of around \$900. It is not complex, it is not equitable and it is not new. It is typical of the government's disregard for and neglect of the western suburbs. As Mr Mulholland said of the northern suburbs and of the far south-eastern, where there are safe Labor seats, there tend just not to be the services.

The recent announcement of a bus bonanza boosting services to better connect our suburbs sounded so very promising, but it only delivered some longer operating hours – that is good – and a few extra services. It was exactly the same piecemeal approach the government always takes to bus reform. They had the opportunity to do this in 2024, and they rejected it on a cost basis: it is too expensive. But we can drop \$30 billion, \$40 billion, \$50 billion into the Suburban Rail Loop. I will just note, Mr Mulholland, that I think it is overly pessimistic of you to suggest that the delivery date for the Suburban Rail Loop for the northern and western suburbs is vague, because we have actually been told in the west that we can feel confident that Werribee will be hooked up by 2070.

To put it on a less sarcastic note, by way of example, buses were promised in the 2024–25 budget for a new route 140 linking Mount Atkinson to Rockbank station, and that is yet to even commence – seriously, 18 months after the residents were told they were getting a new bus, amongst a veritable blaze of press releases. How long does it take to operationalise a bus route? I get it if it is a new station, sure, but a bus route – a few signs, a few seats, some buses, some drivers. They are all potentially logistical issues, but 18 months and there is still no sign of the bus. A decent bus network would be transformative for the outer-western communities and would cost around \$100 million a year to operate. It is not much more than the cost of a month of free public transport for Melbourne, which was I think around \$70 million or, let us say, three days worth of interest on the state debt.

Certainly improvements to our public transport system could be funded by any number of sources, including tax reform, and yes, it does need to be addressed. But then we also need to look pragmatically at the savings that can be made on other infrastructural needs like roads and highways if we actually have a working bus network, so this is a complex agenda. We need to raise revenue, but we also need to recognise the real benefits not just environmentally but financially that a decent public transport system can offer. I do not think cost is necessarily the barrier, because this has been a long-term problem and something that could have been addressed at any time during Labor's long tenure in government. I think it just ultimately comes down to a lack of priority and a lack of political will.

We support this motion from the Greens before the house. Members might recall that Legalise Cannabis moved a similar motion calling for free public transport not so long ago, but of course this was opposed by both the government and the opposition. In closing, I would just like to commend the motion to the chamber. It is thoughtful, it is appropriate, it is affordable and it is ultimately a profound social good.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:40): I rise today to speak on the motion from the Greens party. Specifically, I rise to oppose the motion that has been put forward. The cost-of-living crisis has hit Victorians hard. Over the past few years we have seen people struggling with rising costs in all sectors of the economy. Chief among these have been the costs around transportation, which have increased by 6.6 per cent Australia-wide in the past year. It is becoming more and more expensive for Victorians to get around, whether they are going to work or to the shops or just travelling for leisure. This has only been made worse by the chaos and war in the Middle East. The war in Iran has driven up global oil prices, which increased the price of transport alongside them. This is not a war that this government chose, but it is a war which has impacts that have been felt globally.

As a state government we cannot control the world around us, but there are certain things that are within our control. The Allan Labor government has done what is within its power to reduce the cost-of-living pressures felt by Victorians as much as possible and to improve fuel security. For the months of April and May, this included making public transport free for all users across the network, saving

commuters hundreds of dollars – a temporary measure to reduce pressure on households and prices at the pump. Free public transport not only made it cheaper to get around for those who use public transport but made it a clearer and cheaper alternative for getting around the state. This encouraged people to take public transport to work and saved millions of litres of petrol during the most acute stages of the ongoing oil crisis.

I want to acknowledge that not everyone in Victoria could make the switch to using public transport as their main means of getting around. Whether they need to use their car for work or they live in areas where public transport is not a viable option, it is important to recognise the struggle that these people face. The policy of the Allan Labor government to implement free public transport did help them indirectly, though, by reducing the amount of petrol being used in Melbourne, whereby shortages were alleviated across the state and prices were driven down.

This is not the only thing that the Allan Labor government is doing to help with the cost-of-living crisis and to reduce petrol usage. From 1 September work from home will be a protected workplace right. Those who can feasibly do so will have the legal right to request to work remotely for at least two days a week, taking cars off the road and reducing cost pressures at the pump. It also reduces crowding on our public transport networks. This not only benefits those who are able to work from home but also benefits those commuters who will see lower demand for petrol and smoother, less crowded rides on public transport. These make up just a section of a broader constellation of policies that the Allan Labor government has introduced to work to ease cost-of-living pressures and reduce the consumption of petrol across our state.

Thankfully, we are through the most dangerous phase of the oil crisis, and shortages have eased across the state due to the good work of our friends up in Canberra. However, the costs are still high, and the war is still going. The risks faced by global oil markets and in turn the high prices of petrol and diesel at the pump are still present. That is why the Allan Labor government is continuing to act. Beyond just making public transport free for these past two months, we have extended half-price public transport fares for the remainder of the calendar year. This means fares will be capped at \$5.70 for those with full-fare tickets and \$2.85 for those with concession tickets. This will save the average daily public transport commuter \$850 between 1 June 2026 and 1 January 2027. It also means that we will have the cheapest daily fares in Australia.

We want Victorians who have made the switch to using public transport in their day-to-day lives over the past few months to continue to do so. As I said before, this will have direct benefits for those who use public transport and indirect benefits for Victorians from all over the state. Continuing to encourage people who can use public transport to do so will continue to save petrol across the state. This will help also reduce the cost pressures faced by those who cannot make the switch to using public transport. Making fares half-price is a sensible step to relieve the pressures felt by Victorians who use public transport to get around. I will hasten to add that on top of the half-price fares for the remainder of this year, public transport remains free for seniors on weekends and completely free for children under the age of 18.

These sensible policies, combined with the 20 per cent discount that we are offering on car registrations, are offering further cost-of-living relief to the Victorian community. They also reduce the pressure faced by motorists by reducing the petrol being used on our roads daily, reducing prices and the chance of shortages. Ensuring fuel security and reducing cost-of-living pressures are currently the top priorities of the Allan Labor government, and the evidence of the success of this policy is clear. According to the most recent ABS statistics on the matter, the cost of transportation has risen by 6.6 per cent across the major capital cities. This includes an astonishing 9.3 per cent increase in Brisbane over the last year. In Melbourne, meanwhile, we have had the lowest cost increase, at only 3.5 per cent over the last year. While this is still not ideal, we are the only capital with an increase below the 6.6 per cent average, and we have by far the best result.

We all hope for a swift and peaceful conclusion to the conflict in the Strait of Hormuz so that the pressure our transportation systems face can be relieved on a more permanent basis. In the meantime, not only are the Allan Labor government taking serious action on the cost-of-living crisis, we are also having clear success. Not only are the actions that the Allan Labor government is taking working, they are also fiscally responsible. At a time of rising debt costs, it is irresponsible to throw away the budget surplus that has been delivered by the Allan Labor government. That is in part why we are also moving to a half-price fare model. It is a more fiscally sustainable way of providing cost-of-living relief and still allows for the achievement of a budget surplus in the 2026–27 financial year. There are no details given on what taxes the Greens propose to introduce to make up the shortfall that would be generated, but I can tell you that they would have to be extensive. By slashing public transport fares, the effect encouraging Victorians to maintain the switch over to public transport will still remain and an important cost-of-living relief will still be present, but it will be at the cost of the state's fiscal health.

The Allan Labor government will act in a fiscally responsible way to bring down the cost of living. What is presented in this motion is not that simple. It is politics over substance from the Greens political party. It seeks a one-size-fits-all solution to a massively complex issue. Not only would making public transport free on an ongoing basis be incredibly expensive, as the Greens motion suggests, it would require ridiculous, near impossible levels of new taxation. It sounds wonderful on paper – we could make public transport free and frequent permanently if we just taxed businesses more – but it is just a complete fantasy. Free public transport makes sense in a moment of crisis, as we have faced in the past few months. As an ongoing policy it costs a ton. It limits our ability to fund necessary service improvements while benefiting those who are in a position to use the network and excluding those who cannot. The constellation of measures introduced by the Allan Labor government are doing the work, reducing the consumption of petrol and providing real and significant cost-of-living relief. The Allan Labor government is doing all of this while still ensuring fiscal stability is present without having to find a new onerous tax to raise or introduce. By doing so we are ensuring that we are not forgoing future upgrades to the Victorian public transport system. The combination of all these factors is why I oppose the motion, and I encourage all of my colleagues to do so.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:49): We are in a cost-of-living crisis; that is a fact. I hope, however, that we are very careful not to outsource the entire responsibility to individuals and nations that we have absolutely no control over. Businesses were fleeing this state before any overseas war broke out. 350 small businesses close their doors every single day. Victoria has not provided businesses with a good environment to thrive and with certainty. Businesses are leaving because of overbearing tax burdens and because of red tape. That is a reality. Rental providers are not leaving the state because of an overseas war – international wars affect other states too. They are leaving, again, because of overbearing tax burdens and because of red tape. It is a lot easier to have a rental property in any other state with less compliance.

**Michael Galea**: On a point of order, Acting President, I am just wondering if Dr Heath could be relevant to the motion, please. This is about public transport.

**Renee HEATH**: Further to the point of order, Acting President, I will read it out:

That this house notes that:

- (1) in a cost-of-living crisis –

**Michael Galea**: It is a bit of a wide –

**Renee HEATH**: No, it is not, Mr Galea. I will continue on.

**Michael Galea**: On a point of order, Acting President, as wide as the debate has been in some areas, none of the lead speakers have gone to what Dr Heath is referring to. I would ask that she please speak to the motion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Whilst I agree with you, Mr Galea, it has been a wideranging debate, and I do ask that Dr Heath come back to the –

*Members interjecting.*

**Katherine Copsy:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, I did not read my motion out at the start when moving it in my name, but point (3) of the motion does note that the improvements could be funded by taxing the major banks and big corporations.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** As I indicated before, I would ask Dr Heath return to the substance of the motion.

**Renee HEATH:** I will respond now directly to Ms Copsy's point of order, and that is: I do not agree with the methods the Greens are presenting to fund this campaign of theirs, because if they had their way, the extra taxes on banks would drive up costs for the consumer. It would make everything less affordable, and then banks would join the rental providers and the 350 small businesses that also close their doors every day and decide to make their home in a more business-friendly state. Not only that, it would make home ownership more out of reach, driving up the housing crisis.

When the Allan Labor government decided to pay millions of taxpayer dollars to cancel the Commonwealth Games, not only did they break promises to rural and regional Victorians across the state, but they signalled to the world that Victoria is closed for business. Since Labor have come into power they have added or increased taxes 67 times. That is not due to a foreign war, that is due to Labor. Unlike what the Treasurer tried to tell us this morning, taxes do not actually make life better and easier for people; they make things less affordable. The cost-of-living crisis is exacerbated by factors that are external to us and things that we cannot control, but that is not what has caused this cost-of-living crisis. When the government allows corruption to run rife and \$15 billion to be lost of taxpayer funds, somebody has got to foot that bill, and that is Victorians.

Every time a budget blows out it costs people money – money that belongs to the taxpayer. For a whole year I have raised concerns about the businesses in Bald Hill Road that are having their own cost-of-living crisis, not because of Donald Trump or because of a war in Iran but because the Allan Labor government's Big Build has cut off access to their business for almost two years. That is going to cost the taxpayer. Rather, why don't we get the management under control? It is mismanagement that has run small businesses into the ground, that has caused a cost-of-living crisis and that is making life unmanageable in this state. That is why Victorians are feeling the pinch, and now the government have to spend more taxpayer dollars to help Victorians deal with the cost-of-living crisis that they created.

I have spoken to hundreds of Eastern Victoria Region residents over the past couple of months about public transport, and the reason is this: I have a major concern that I have a responsibility to raise, and that is, while the government is offering free or half-price train fares, which are getting more people onto train lines, the government has also taken PSOs off 119 metro stations while violent crime is through the roof. In fact I will give you a statistic on that; I will just find it. There has been an increase of 74 per cent in serious crime at train stations. I would accept it, maybe, if crime was going down and, as crime was going down, so was the level of PSOs, but that is not what is happening in this state. Crime is going up. Seventy-four per cent is a leap. That is not a little incidental. That is not a mistake. That is a trend that things are going the wrong way. So why is it that the government, at a time when there is more demand – more people are using it – are making it less safe? Like I said, I have spoken to hundreds in the Eastern Victoria Region about this, and that is not an exaggeration, because I got every one of them to sign my petition. There have been hundreds.

I will talk about a few experiences. Some people have had terrifying experiences themselves. Some have witnessed crime. Others have just spoken about the feeling of not being as safe when there is not a PSO there. While the government says that community safety is its highest priority, its actions are telling a completely different story. I spoke about the man at a train station recently who had just had surgery. There was man who was very drug affected, and his dog started barking at this man. He

became a victim of crime. This guy repeatedly punched him in the head, punched him in the stomach and tore his shirt down the middle. There was no PSO around, and that happened at a train station. I am really upset to see that, after the death of Aidan Becker at the Mernda train station, not only have the government reduced the hours of the Mernda police station but they have also taken PSOs off that station. That to me is absolutely unbelievable. This is despite the fact that two years prior – and I have spoken about this in this house – there was a young kid, at exactly the same spot where Aidan Becker, an innocent man, lost his life, that was chased by a machete there. I cannot abide this. This experience was known to police, and still PSOs are coming off. Crime is at an all-time high under Labor and serious offences against people on train stations, including assault, robbery, stalking and harassment, have increased by 74 per cent in the past four years. So please stop passing the buck. It is your responsibility to deal with these things.

The coalition will address this issue by returning all PSOs to those 119 stations. Not only will we do that, we will add an additional 200 PSOs covering night shifts between 6 pm and the last shift.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Renee HEATH:** Ms Shing, why don't you go look for the \$15 billion rather than interrupting my speech here. We will reopen closed police stations, and we will deliver 300 extra police to keep our community safe. Our incredible police are fighting an uphill battle. They are 1500 –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Renee HEATH:** No, she cannot eat into my time. Three minutes they have eaten –

**Jacinta Ermacora:** On a point of order, Acting President, I cannot see much relevance to free public transport, and even just straying a little bit from that main point, the debate has been completely off topic in a wide range of –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** As I indicated before, Ms Ermacora, this has been a wideranging debate. I would call the member back to the motion and for the rest of it to be in silence.

**Renee HEATH:** We have effective early intervention and rehab programs for young people that are at risk of becoming involved –

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order –

**Renee HEATH:** This is a protection racket.

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, firstly, I would ask Dr Heath to withdraw that assertion on the basis that it is unparliamentary and offensive.

**Renee HEATH:** What assertion?

**Harriet Shing:** Do you want to repeat it on the record?

**Renee HEATH:** What assertion, Minister? Actually, speak through the Chair.

**Harriet Shing:** I heard you say something. It was unparliamentary and offensive, and I ask that you withdraw. Your time is up.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Dr Heath, will you withdraw your comment?

**Renee HEATH:** I do not know what she is asking me to withdraw.

**Harriet Shing:** 'Protection racket' – seriously?

**Renee HEATH:** You want me to withdraw saying it is a protection racket? Is that what you are asking?

**Harriet Shing:** Don't repeat the allegation; just withdraw it.

**Nick McGowan:** On a point of order, President, if the member's objection is to the member on this side using the phrase or terminology 'protection racket' – that is all I heard; I did not hear anything other than that – then I would suggest to the President that that is a well-known, well-used phrase. It does not necessarily specifically impugn any one person.

**Harriet Shing:** There are lots of well-known phrases, Mr McGowan, that are deeply unparliamentary. I am just asking for this one to be withdrawn.

**Nick McGowan:** I think I have made my point of order nonetheless.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think when I came into the room, Dr Heath withdrew that.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Well, she actually did. She got up and she withdrew, but taking to account Mr McGowan's comment, there should be an exercise – maybe in the new term, when I am not here – going through all of this terminology and seeing if the house agrees or not whether it needs to be deemed unparliamentary. It is kind of a grey area in some instances, but then maybe there will be a smarter Presiding Officer that can work through all of that in a couple of months time.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:01): This motion by Ms Copsey, by the Greens, is calling for free public transport. I know that this is something that they have been calling for for a long time. We need to look at this in terms of resources. All resources in an economy are scarce, and there are various ways of allocating those resources. The most efficient way of allocating resources is to have a market with a pricing mechanism, and then the price allows those resources to be allocated in the most efficient way. The most inefficient way of allocating resources is through socialist central planning and making everything 'free', and that is precisely what the Greens are proposing here.

The pricing system that we already have for public transport is highly irrational, where we have short trips that are excessively expensive and long trips that are ridiculously cheap. What I would like to see in Victoria is actually a rational public transport pricing system. Maybe before that point people will connect the dots and say, 'Well, they're always complaining about why there's not a bus in this area or why the buses are so infrequent or why there isn't a train station built, and at the same time we have a highly irrational pricing system.' Maybe they could connect the dots between those things, because when you have a centrally planned system, what you end up with is, rather than rationing through pricing, rationing through queuing. That is why in free systems, rather than paying for a service, you simply do not get access to the service. That is why under socialist systems that control food you queue up for bread. That is why under our public health system, where we have free public health, that is great but, unless you are having a baby or having a heart attack, it is actually very difficult to get access to a hospital for a procedure, as my family discovered recently through one of my children.

Indeed it is helpful to look at other parts of the world. One part that I know very well and is widely acknowledged to have pretty much the best public transport system in the world is Japan. One of the reasons that their public transport system is so good is, firstly, it is not actually run by the government – their public transport system is fully privatised – but also they have a rational pricing system where you pay for the distance travelled. If you travel a short distance, you pay a really cheap fee, and if you travel a long distance, it costs more money.

Suffice to say, if we want to have a system where everything is free, quote unquote, what we are going to end up doing is having constantly competing interests. Rather than demand producing the capital required to provide for the desires of the population – in this case public transport – we are going to have a system where we constantly have to force the people that are not taking public transport to pay for the people that are taking public transport, which will always result in conflict and always does result in conflict. That is why economic systems like what the Greens are proposing nearly always fail, and if they do not fail, they cause lots of misery in the meantime.

The Libertarian Party will definitely not be supporting free public transport. In fact I would urge the government to move towards a more rational pricing model, because one of the reasons that we do not have the capital to allocate to lots of these things, to expanding public transport, is because our pricing system is totally irrational at the moment. The government made it more irrational when they got rid of one of the zones. We used to have three zones to try and make it a little bit rational; now we have only got two. But our pricing system is ending up in misallocation of resources, and if we want those scarce resources allocated in the most efficient way, the way to do that is to have a rational price signal built into the system that will mean that people will take the most efficient means of transport rather than take whatever is subsidised by the government and other people who are not taking that form of transport. So the Libertarian Party will not be supporting this motion.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:06): Can I start by saying that the effects of Donald Trump's war on Iran are being felt right across the globe, and while our government cannot control events like those in the Middle East, we are certainly taking action in both the short and long term to make life more affordable for Victorians. In the public transport space, we did that through the emergency measure of free public transport, and it was a game changer in lessening the immediate blow of this overseas conflict. It was the true universality of this policy that made it so popular and so effective at bringing down working Victorians' household budgets. Communities up and down my electorate benefited in all different ways from this measure. Whether it was the students living in Brunswick taking the number 19 tram to uni every day or the office workers living in Broady taking the train to and from work on the Craigieburn line – or somebody who recently wrote to me, a high schooler, taking the 561 from Res to Coburg for his part-time job – this policy was real cost-of-living relief for all Victorians from all walks of life.

The effects of free public transport extended far beyond real cost-of-living relief. Victoria has some of the best regional offerings in Australia, and our free public transport allowed so many Victorians to escape the city and enjoy everything our state has to offer. Certainly I have heard from constituents that live in the inner city and mainly use bikes to get around while studying at uni. Like many folks in the inner north – well, not me; I am not an avid cyclist – one is an avid cyclist, and free public transport allowed him and his partner to explore wonderful regional offerings, packing light and hopping on the V/Line every weekend. It was a delight to hear. It opened up their world in ways they did not expect, and it was all right at their doorstep, from the Bass Coast to the Bellarine, from Bendigo to Ballarat, from early morning V/Lines to late afternoon returns to Southern Cross. He recounted how they often visited at least three separate towns in two months of free public transport, and they were already planning their next weekend trip on the V/Line. For him it was unfamiliar territory. But for so many businesses across our wonderful regional areas he was just one of many, many new customers – Victorians that would not normally explore Beechworth or Torquay or Inverloch if it were not for the free train and bus that carried them there. Not only did free public transport ease pressure on household budgets during a worldwide oil crisis, it brought new people into Victoria's wonderful regional towns, supporting local businesses and opening up the state to experiences, with so many Victorians choosing a day trip or weekend away when they might otherwise have stayed in Melbourne.

It did not just open the doors for Victorians to spend their autumn weekends in Victoria's picturesque regions; patronage in the inner city has now reached pre-COVID levels. Melburnians did not just take the opportunity for a weekend or daytrip out in the city; public transport use across Melbourne's trams, trains and buses has been absolutely supercharged. Over the two months of free public transport it is estimated that 100 million trips were taken across our state's public transport system. That is less cars on the road, less congestion, more time with family and friends and more foot traffic in and out of our city's fantastic pubs, cafes and shops. This government is not just about short-term emergency measures.

We are also looking to the future, and we understand that the effects of the overseas conflict will continue to affect Victorians far into the future. That is why we have made fares in Victoria half-price for the rest of the year. As I have mentioned, the impacts of Donald Trump's actions – well, they were

fast and brutal. The cost of filling up the car for the commute to work or to take the kids to school spiked drastically and at no fault of Victorians. I am really proud that Labor's free public transport was able to soften the blow for working families and their transport costs. The worst of it might be over, but our government is always looking for ways to make Victorians' lives more affordable. That is why we introduced half-price public transport fares for the rest of the year, because we know that whilst Victorians have overcome the worst shocks of this fuel crisis, for many families there is still pain. Our government is not a government of short-term bandaids. We are a government that responds to immediate global shocks with decisive measures, but we also respond to the medium- and long-term challenges. We know that half-price public transport fares will continue to make a real difference to Victorian families. It is worth noting that the half-price public transport fares will assist those that we know need it most and that students and concession card holders will see their public transport fares brought even further down, with a uni student now only having to pay \$1.42 to get anywhere in the state, whether that be to uni, a part-time job or even a night out in the city.

There are some in this chamber that understandably have called for us to continue free public transport indefinitely, but that fundamentally misses a key point of what fares do for our public transport network. When you tap on and off and you pay a fare when travelling on a bus, a train or a tram, that is money that is invested back into our public transport system. Free public transport has been a highly effective and popular stopgap for families feeling it at the pump, but we want to continue to add services like the 24,000 weekly bus services we have added. If you want to continue to roll out fantastic new rolling stock like the X'Trapolis 2.0, or if you want to continue to increase accessibility to our tram network, it is critical that revenue generated from fares continues to come in so that it can be reinvested into our public transport system. You see, with half-price fares for the rest of the year, our government gets the balance right. We can continue to fund our already world-class public transport system with new rolling stock, upgrades to stations and more frequent services, while having amongst the lowest daily fares in the country at \$5.70, much lower than Sydney at \$19.30 a day and Adelaide at \$12.50 a day. It is only Labor that can both keep our public transport fares amongst the lowest daily in Australia and increase the services, improving accessibility and maintaining one of the best public transport networks in the country – indeed if you spoke to some of the tourists that I do in Melbourne CBD, they would say 'in the world'.

In summary, our government is getting the balance right, providing much-needed relief to Victorians with their transport bills with both short-term and long-term measures while also ensuring that Victorians can stay connected to employment opportunities, to education and entertainment through increased services and better rolling stock. The truth is that only Labor can get this balance right. Only Labor has a plan to make life easier and more affordable for Victorians.

With the time that I have left, I actually just want to address some of the remarks that were made by other members in this chamber to this motion before us. I will begin perhaps with the mover of the motion, who spoke to the importance of this debate, and I join her in saying thank you for bringing it to us, because, for me, I love an opportunity to talk about public transport and how much it is loved. What was also raised was something that I have personally been following, and that is the Melton electrification announcement. I have heard that being referred to as feasibility planning, but it is simply not true. It represents a real misunderstanding of the steps that go into delivering a project like this – a very significant project. This is to be expected, because the Melton electrification plan is not just simply a feasibility plan but a vital development and preparatory works. They are finalising the design, the scope and the delivery of timelines. It includes securing power supply, site investigations, final approvals and working with our contract partners to award the delivery for contract in mid-2027. It is not just a feasibility plan; it is much, much more than that, and I would implore all to understand the depths required to get this off the ground. Can I just put that on the record and say that I am joining with the member for Melton in very much getting behind this project. I know that it will be much loved in that part of the world when it comes to be.

Can I also just finish up with some remarks that I wish to make regarding the Tarneit line: residents in Tarneit cannot get a train. Well, let me just say there are certainly train services right across the west, and those services that have been improved since the introduction of the Metro Tunnel. We all need to get on the same page when it comes to the enormity of our system and knowing that we on this side are big supporters of public transport and know that the last two months have been extraordinarily well received. I believe that in the next few months until the end of the year we will see many continue to take up free public transport and half-price fares with much gusto.

**Gaëlle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:16): I am pleased to be able to speak on this motion. Public transport is so important. I use it a lot. I came down on the train to come to Parliament, and I will be heading back that way as well. I just think it is worth putting on the record too that at the last election in November 2022, it was actually on 9 October that our side of politics announced lower fares for public transport. That was on 9 October, and then guess what, Daniel Andrews in November announced a reduction in fares as well. I think it is often talked about, but credit where credit is due: it was actually our side of politics that was bringing down the cost of public transport. It particularly made a big impact to regional areas and that accessibility, because it has been very expensive in the past to catch the train from Bendigo to Melbourne, for example.

The free public transport certainly cannot support the Greens approach, which is ‘Everything is free; someone else will pay for it.’ I think we know the reality is that this has cost the budget over \$430 million, so there is a cost to public transport, and we need to be mindful of that. I know certainly fuel prices have been extraordinary and giving some relief to people is important. But some of the issues that we confronted, particularly on the regional lines, were that it was announced very quickly and then we had a huge amount of people using the trains and people standing for hours, travelling places and then also being left on the platform and being told, ‘No, you’ve got to hop off,’ with not enough space for them to get back on. We had people with prams and people with scooters that were being told, ‘Sorry, no space for you.’ I also heard from people that needed medical appointments with specialists that had been booked well ahead, and because of this announcement, there was actually no ability to book a seat anymore. That was removed, and it caused a lot of angst for people that had waited a long time for medical appointments.

When we talk about public transport, Labor certainly promise big. They have promised big, certainly in Bendigo – more frequent services, faster train services. As I mentioned in this house yesterday, Golden Square Action Group has been in contact pointing out how they are actually slower than they have been in the past. For things that had been promised, like the Harcourt station, there was not even a bus service operating properly.

We have raised on our side the need for more PSOs, particularly in regional areas, and the lack of bus services that exist so close to Bendigo in places like Marong and Strathfieldsaye. There are very built-up, growing populations there, but there is very little support when it comes to public transport. There was some money allocated to bus review funding in the last budget for the Bendigo area, and that work has not yet commenced. I think what we see under this government is a constant waste of taxpayer money – we saw that with the \$15 billion on corruption – and I feel that it is just so important that we do follow the money, because we need more services, particularly in regional areas. We need better public transport. We need money to invest in our hospitals. We need money to repair and build better roads and bridges. There is a very long list, and yet we continue to see waste under this government. It needs to stop. I hope it certainly will come November.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:20): It has been a great debate this afternoon, and I appreciate the thought that members have given to their contributions. I will just address a few things that have been raised in the debate which are a consistent feature of discussion around pricing of fares and whether or not free public transport is feasible. Clearly it is. This is something that the government has chosen to turn off and on like a tap. We had a little free public transport celebration when the government opened the Metro Tunnel, and they chose to pull this lever in response to the fuel crisis recently. It is something that the government can choose to do. It is an affordable measure

in the scheme of public budgets. There have been several times this afternoon when it has been stated that we have to choose between service delivery and service improvement and free public transport, and plainly that is not the case. We can do both – we can walk and chew gum – and the Greens position is that we should. We should have free and frequent public transport available permanently for the people of Victoria.

At the very least the government should be continuing making free public transport available while the conditions that prompted them to bring it in persist. We still see the Strait of Hormuz being closed, and we still see a global fuel crisis on top of and compounding the cost-of-living crisis that Victorians are facing. It is pretty cheeky of the government, honestly, to hike prices again, at the end of May, when those conditions persist and to ask Victorians to be grateful for their 50 per cent fares, which it has only graciously extended until just after the state election. I think Victorians can see through that. I think Victorians deserve better, and I would urge Victorians to demand better. We know that for the price of a single polluting toll road the government could provide free public transport in this state for 25 years, so it is a matter of priorities.

If you want to go further – and indeed the Greens do – we have a different vision. We have a vision for this state where if we make big corporations like the gambling industry, like the fossil fuel industry, pay their fair share of tax, we can have the things that we need that make life decent, affordable and dignified, like free public transport and like continued investment in protection of and expansion of public housing rather than seeing it torn down. These things are possible. We get told constantly from this chamber that they are impossible, and then suddenly in moments the government finds some political courage, usually at the urging of one of the other parties in this place that have put a good idea on the table –

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Katherine COPSEY:** We are going to try. Mr McIntosh urges the Greens to win enough seats to form government. Let me tell you, we have been here since 2006, we continue to grow and we continue to do the work and put ideas on the table that the Labor government then takes up. Free public transport is just the latest example in decades of Greens wins that have come out of this place. We ended native forest logging. That was impossible until it was done. We are going to keep seeing progressive policy implemented in this state at the urging of the Greens, and we have got a plan to do it. We have looked into what this would cost the budget, and we have put revenue measures on the table that would help pay for this and many other things that would help Victorians at this moment of housing and cost-of-living crises.

I really do thank members for their consideration. I also just want to touch on, in my closing, what I think has been one of the great things through this period of free public transport in Victoria: the increased focus that we have seen on the persistent systemic failures of our public transport system in Victoria. I spoke to a number of those – service frequency, lack of PT coverage and PT deserts – that have been so persistent. This government need to stop promising at election after election that they are going to fund this infrastructure, like the electrification of the Melton line, like the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 compliance, and just actually get on and do it. It is shameful that we are still waiting for these basic services. But the Greens are really pleased to have had an opportunity this afternoon to keep putting this idea on the table. We want to see public transport made free and frequent in Victoria, and I urge all parties to get behind that idea today.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (7):* Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

*Noes (31):* Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev

McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

**Motion negatived.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

**Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

*Inquiry into Electricity Supply for Electric Vehicles*

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:32): I rise to make a statement on a tabled report, *Electricity Supply for Electric Vehicles*. Worldwide, EVs are displacing internal combustion vehicles. This is apparent here, with EV sales surging in the last 12 months. Family cars, utes and freight vehicles are all electrifying, and this has accelerated since the Iran war. Electrification of our transport fleet will save our nation's trade balance \$40 billion to \$50 billion per year, create jobs locally and deliver energy security for our economy. Findings and recommendations from the inquiry include that on average people only drive 30 kilometres a day and many EVs only need to be charged every 10 to 14 days. Sustained misinformation, often by politicians, means education is required to bust myths. EV travel for tourism is cheaper than petrol, and all levels of government and industry must work together to ensure charging infrastructure meets tourist demand in regional economies. Vehicle-to-grid connections can further strengthen our grid capacity and should be supported. EV heavy freight can enable night transportation of goods, and distributors must work to deliver timely connections with dedicated service teams.

It is disappointing that the Liberals and Nationals do not accept the commonsense findings in this inquiry's report, talking down new technologies, as they have done for decades with solar and batteries. The minority report of theirs is riddled with errors, like stating in the opening paragraph that the legislated net zero target is 2050 when in fact it is 2045. I would hope they would stop talking our electrical infrastructure down. I encourage them to propose solutions and not peddle fear.

**Victorian Auditor-General's Office**

*Out-of-Home Care Services*

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:34): I am pleased to speak on the Victorian Auditor-General's Office's *Out-of-Home Care Services* report that has just been tabled today. I attended a briefing earlier today, and I think it is really important to highlight – it is very concerning, really – that in Victoria we have 9353 children in out-of-home care; that was last year, at 30 June. That is a significant number of kids in our state that need support. The report found the state government is focusing on kinship care, which is important, but foster carers provide the flexibility in the system that is so important, and it is very concerning to see the number of foster carers in Victoria declining. We have seen quite significant numbers. I know in 2022–23 there were 550 foster carers that left the system. There are more leaving the system than are coming in, and that is a big concern.

It is interesting to note that Victoria lags behind other states with the foster care allowance. It is quite low in comparison to other states. The recent state budget saw an increase to the foster care allowance, but that simply covers inflation. When we speak to foster carers, they flag a number of concerns just with the costs continuing to rise. It is very difficult to afford the extra care that is needed, and sometimes there are very complex needs that kids have. They may have specialist appointments, medical appointments that they need to get to, and being able to afford those additional costs is difficult. With the cost of petrol going up, I know in regional areas the additional costs involved in travelling long distances are very difficult for families, and I remember speaking to a foster carer from Castlemaine who talked about some of those issues.

One of the elements highlighted in this report is that the data kept by the department is not very easy to follow. It is collected in free text fields, which makes it very difficult to monitor. They cannot use it very effectively to see how a child is travelling and for people to know their history. We also hear about the high staffing turnover that seems to occur, and that is a big concern when you want that continuity of care, from the department's perspective, in helping to look after these children that are in desperate need. It is concerning to see the number of kids that are going into residential care. We have seen the media reports on some of the situations that have occurred, and it is evidently a place of last resort.

We need to get more foster carers in the system. I just want to acknowledge the incredible work that these families do. I know some people that are involved in foster care and others more recently that I spoke to who simply went to an information session and were really moved and wanted to do the training needed to do to be able to assist. There are examples that you hear of kids turning up with just their bags and a sleeping bag or a backpack and being left with a family without a wraparound care service or time. I think there is just so much that needs to improve in the system. To have 10,000 kids in our state that are in this need is just significant, and we need to acknowledge that in this chamber. I think a lot more needs to be done to support foster carers, to listen to the concerns that they are raising and to review that allowance and increase it, because there is a real need to retain them in our system to provide an environment of care for these children.

#### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

##### *Inquiry into the Redevelopment of Melbourne's Public Housing Towers*

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:38): I rise to make a statement in response to the Labor government's response to the Legal and Social Committee's inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers. During this inquiry the committee heard from a range of witnesses: community legal centres, housing experts, human rights experts, peak bodies, advocacy groups and, most importantly, the public housing residents. The undeniable testimonies made it clear: pressing ahead with the demolition and privatisation of public housing towers is a disastrous plan that this government should urgently reconsider. Instead the government has driven mass community dislocation, with distressed residents relocated to properties purchased or leased from the private market, and some with little to no notice and isolated away from their communities. Let us not forget that these are the very same communities that were forced into hard lockdown during COVID-19, which was enforced by a heavy police presence, with no warning and treated like a bloody crime scene.

The committee made 21 recommendations based on overwhelming evidence from the stakeholders, including those mentioned earlier. Instead of supporting these important recommendations and making every effort to do what is right, this government chose to support only four of these recommendations – abysmal but unsurprising from a government that now prioritises the interests of property developers over the people of the state. They have rejected recommendations 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 13 – recommendations that speak to the transparency, credibility and accountability of decisions to ultimately demolish these public housing towers and not keep them in public hands. Instead this government has refused to guarantee that public land will remain in public hands. They could not say whether any public housing will be built in future demolitions and refused to produce case-by-case evidence justifying demolition over retrofitting.

This government, in their arrogance and disrespect for the 10,000 people that have called the Victorian public housing towers home, have completely abandoned them and taken them for a ride. This Labor government have abandoned their values for the working class. This is a government that could not care less about telling the truth to everyday Victorians, instead turning its back on residents and everyone who was brave enough to give evidence in this inquiry. This is a Labor government that now works for the ultrawealthy, including the property investors. It is a dark day for public housing and for the people of Victoria. What a shameful government this is.

**Victorian Law Reform Commission***Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:41): I rise to make a contribution on one of the most critical and comprehensive reviews of our legal framework of our time, the Victorian Law Reform Commission's report *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences*, and this was tabled in this chamber in April 2022. When this report was handed down after an intensive 18-month inquiry, it did not just suggest minor tweaks to our legal system; it demanded fundamental and structural reforms. The inquiry itself was large. It involved 99 detailed consultations and examined 71 formal submissions, and the result was 91 recommendations designed to shift the justice system from a place of systemic trauma to a place of genuine accountability and healing.

The report breaks its 91 recommendations into several key areas. First, it targets the laws surrounding the acts themselves. The report champions a transition to a strict model of affirmative consent. This shifts the legal burden away from the outdated notion of 'Did the victim say no?' to a proactive requirement: what active steps did the accused take to ensure that consent was enthusiastically given? It also paved the way for stronger, clearer laws against stealthing – the non-consensual removal of a condom – and image-based abuse. Second, it targets the trial process itself. The Victorian Law Reform Commission explicitly stated that criminal trials must be made less traumatic. It called for better judicial directions to dismantle damaging rape myths in front of juries, and it demanded that the professionals handling these complex cases – the judges, magistrates and barristers – must be highly trained specialists in sexual violence. Third, the report recognises that a survivor's journey does not just start or end in a courtroom. It emphasises that victims should never have to walk alone, and to solve this the commission recommended the introduction of dedicated victim advocates – professionals who walk alongside survivors every step of the legal pathway, providing legal advice, emotional support and counselling. Furthermore, the report looks beyond the justice system into our daily lives, calling for an enforceable duty on employers, universities and other institutions to actively eliminate sexual violence and harassment. To oversee this cultural and structural shift, it recommended a world-first institution, a dedicated commission for sexual safety. Finally, there was a recommendation that called for restorative justice. The commission boldly stated that the time had come for restorative justice and alternative pathways to become a mainstream option. For many survivors, a traditional criminal trial which focuses strictly on punishing a perpetrator does not provide closure. Restorative justice allows survivors to safely voice the true impact of the crime, demand accountability and seek healing on their own terms. In conclusion, the report is not just a legal document but a catalyst for cultural change.

Upon its release the Victorian government committed to a historic overhaul to implement these recommendations, including the affirmative consent model and the criminalisation of stealthing. In summary, the legislative reforms and statutory adjustments that were called for and have been acted upon include the affirmative consent model, through the enactment of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Sexual Offences and Other Matters) Act 2022, which formally established a consent model in Victoria. The law explicitly clarifies that a person does not consent unless they say or do something to communicate that consent actively. It also criminalised stealthing, with the same legislative suite explicitly making stealthing, the non-consensual removal of a condom, illegal. Also, it dismantled rape myths and trial protections. Legislative amendments introduced strict limitations on how complainants' sexual history can be cross-examined or used as evidence, effectively mitigating common defence tactics that rely on historical sexual behaviour to imply consent. It also revised judicial directions with the introduction of mandatory updated model jury instructions designed to explicitly counter widespread misconceptions regarding delayed reporting, lack of physical resistance or trauma-induced memory fragmentation.

There were structural and systemic initiatives as well, which included the legal and intermediary support frameworks; the state budget allocating targeted funding to roll out dedicated independent legal representatives and special legal support practitioners for victim-survivors; expansion of

intermediaries; substantial expansions to the intermediary pilot program, which protects vulnerable witnesses and complainants such as children or people with cognitive impairments; specialised judicial and enforcement training; increased investment towards specialised training for Victoria Police, the Office of Public Prosecution and members of the judiciary to guarantee trauma-informed management of sexual offence proceedings; and progress, as I mentioned, on restorative justice. While full interrogation remains an ongoing project, the state incrementally increased funding for restorative justice frameworks and non-adversarial pilots, creating pathways for victim-driven healing metrics outside traditional streams. I commend the report to the house.

### **Victorian Auditor-General's Office**

#### *Out-of-Home Care Services*

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:46): 9353 children are in out-of-home care in Victoria, whether it be in kinship care, in foster care or in the least preferred option, residential care. Surely how a government treats the children in its care must be the mark as to the success or failure of a government. The Auditor-General's report today, *Out-of-Home Care Services: June 2026*, says that this system is failing. It is failing to keep up with demand, and it is failing to retain foster carers, which have declined almost 20 per cent in the last five years. Almost 20 per cent is a net drain on the system – and why? Because this government is not doing the right thing by the foster carers.

Let us look at some of the reasons why. The care allowance – this budget has provided CPI. What does that mean? For a child rated at about level 1, the foster carer gets an additional \$1 a day, but this payment has not occurred for years and years – \$1 a day for caring for some of the most fragile and vulnerable children in this state. If the child is rated at level 4 or 5 – high needs, intensive issues and potential disability – they get up to \$3 a day extra. What is that going to buy a foster carer? What we see time and again is that foster carers are having to dip into their own funds and not being provided that resource from the government to look after, in short, the government's children – these children that cannot be looked after, for whatever reason, by their parents. We see Victoria has the lowest base rate in Australia, so in this state we are paying our foster carers the lowest rate. There has been a 20 per cent net loss of foster carers in the system. That is an indictment on the government. Carer attrition, reduced recruitment and reliance on more-expensive residential care – and by heck, nobody wants to see children go into residential care. We asked the Auditor-General today, 'What is the youngest age?' A four-year-old child going into residential care – that should send a shiver down every member of the government's spine.

What else do we see? The government is unfortunately failing our Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal children. They have the highest rate in the state of being in out-of-home care. Indeed, as of June 2025, the last set of data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented 31.2 per cent of children in out-of-home care. Let me put that in context. If you go to the report, on page 18 – it is a sobering thought – there is a projection. The government adopted Closing the Gap in July 2020. The projection for 2031 is that there will be 1345 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. On this trajectory, on this projection – not my comments but the Auditor-General assessing the department – we are going to see 3709 children. That is a differential of 2360 children. These are not just numbers; these are children in out-of-home care that the government is failing. It is failing to make those inroads, and we see this at an alarming rate.

Unfortunately, we top the charts compared to other states. In the thousand children rated against a thousand, we have almost one in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. This is unacceptable. This government has had a decade to make inroads into this, and it is failing these children. If we look at this, the government is failing out-of-home care. It is failing carers by not resourcing them properly, and they do a heavy lift. They care so deeply for these kids. They use their own out-of-pocket personal expenses and then take traumatised kids and nurture them and give them a life, and this government is not providing that support to these out-of-home carers. Very sadly, rather than closing the gap, the gap is widening compared to non-Aboriginal children in this state. It is an

indictment on this government. They must do better, and they should do better. We have a plan to do better come 20 November this year. We will do better, and we will see better outcomes for our children.

### **Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion**

#### *Interim report*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:51): I rise today to make a statement on the interim report of the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, which was tabled on 12 May. Firstly, I start the contribution remembering the 15 people who were murdered at Bondi on 15 December 2025 in an act that was fuelled by a hatred of our Jewish community.

The royal commission was established following those attacks. Given expansive terms of reference to examine these matters, it is a royal commission established under letters patent issued by the Governor-General but also by letters patent in identical terms issued by the Governor in the state of Victoria on the advice of the Premier so that it operates as a national royal commission and hence tables its reports to us as members of the Victorian community through the Parliament. It is important that we do note this interim report and we do read its comments, because we know the impact that the events at Bondi in particular have had on communities right around Australia, predominantly in Sydney but also significantly here in Melbourne, and the interconnectedness between the Jewish communities of Melbourne and Sydney is significant. Some of the victims of Bondi were in fact members of the Jewish community here in Melbourne visiting family and friends.

This particular edition of the interim report largely focuses on some of the intelligence-related issues that are largely in the discussion in the report, and this interim report is largely focused on some of the counterterrorism structures and operations and on-the-ground security, particularly with respect to Sydney and New South Wales. But they are relevant, and the lessons and the learnings are relevant, here in Victoria. Here in Victoria, in this state, the Jewish community in the Southern Metropolitan Region have been the targets of organised antisemitic terrorist attacks such as at the Adass Israel Synagogue not too long ago. The Jewish community here knows the fear that the elevated threat levels and the elevated instances of antisemitic sentiment across the community are having on them; they are experiencing it every day. So it is important that we watch this royal commission closely, that we watch the hearings that have been going on in Sydney and that we learn the lessons of what happened in Sydney and apply them to our counterterrorism, our intelligence-based responses and our community safety and security responses here in Melbourne.

It is also important that members of the Jewish community here in Melbourne and also members of the broader community who have experiences of and understandings of antisemitism make sure that their voices are heard as part of the broader royal commission process. Every submission to the royal commission in its ongoing work builds a much clearer understanding of the extent of antisemitism in Australia and its impact on social cohesion. Submissions to this royal commission close on 14 June. If there are members out there in the community who feel that they still have something to say, there is still an opportunity to make sure that your voice is heard as part of the royal commission process. We stand with our Jewish community here in Melbourne in what are troubling times. There is a rise in antisemitic activity and trends of antisemitism. There is no room for antisemitism here in this state, and we as a government and as a community remain steadfastly committed to ensuring that every Victorian can live safely, freely and without fear of discrimination or hatred. We will continue to celebrate the Jewish community here in Melbourne and encourage them to celebrate their culture out in our community, free from fear. We need to be doing everything we can to make sure that is possible.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance**

#### *Budget papers 2026–27*

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:56): I say to every Victorian who relies on their local council to collect their weekly waste, to keep our children safe at pools and to keep community facilities clean: those services are now at risk. Last month, the Allan Labor government resurrected an

innocuously named program, the Local Government Fair Jobs Code. Its stated intent – reducing insecure work in local government – sounds noble, but its impact will be severe. Councils are not wholly owned subsidiaries of the state; they are separately elected governments, representing their own communities, spending ratepayers money – your money. Unlike its sister code, this will be enshrined in legislation. A taxpayer-funded watchdog will enforce compliance and punish councils that cannot comply. The Allan Labor government will be directing councils to deliver their core services at an inflated cost. Councils will either go broke or cut services and scrounge for money. You might as well call this the Labor cuts code.

When Minister Hamer appeared before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), he could not name a single council that asked for this code – not one – yet he claimed to have engaged in various discussions. But in the same breath he said it was just an understanding. When asked whether he met with Trades Hall, he said, ‘Not specifically.’ Well, we know exactly who he spoke to. At the ALP state conference, Minister Hamer said:

To the ASU and all union delegates in this room – this Code is for your members. It’s overdue, it’s real, it will be mandatory – and we’re getting it done.

The Australian Services Union’s own media release could not be clearer: mandated, tick; enforced by a separate regulator, tick; aged care and early childhood services retained in-house, tick; mandated consultation on procurement decisions, tick; targeting of contracting, tick. Seemingly every union demand was delivered by the minister in the budget, and it will be paid for by ratepayers in their next rates notice. That is how this government works – union coffers are filled and Labor polling booths are staffed, but your services are cut and your rates are raised.

This code will restrict councils’ ability to use private contractors. In rural and regional Victoria, many councils depend on private contractors to deliver essential services on time and on budget. Minister Hamer was confronted with the potential example at PAEC of a contractor mowing grass in outer hamlet communities. Would the code force that council to employ a full-time worker instead? The minister could not give a straight answer, but according to the ASU, the government has agreed to make outsourcing to contractors rare. These contractors are sole traders and small businesses whose income could dry up in due course. At a PAEC hearing in 2024, the department’s own presentation clearly said the code was already developed. Yet two years later, Minister Hamer tells us it is still being developed. The minister has not read his brief, or he is keeping a secret, or he is going back to the drawing board.

Two years ago there was an advisory panel. Who was on it? Were they forced to sign non-disclosure agreements? Two years ago pilot programs were promised. Which councils were involved? Were they a success? If so, why wasn’t the code implemented last financial year, as promised? One senior council officer told me the sector thought the code had died a death, but it has been resurrected to pay a ransom to the ASU before the next election. Minister Hamer delivered that ransom himself: \$5.4 million in the budget to put local people out of business and add compliance costs to financially unsustainable councils. When councils pay, ratepayers pay. Your waste gets collected less often, your parks fall into disrepair, your council-owned kindergarten, library and pool operate at reduced hours and you get hit with a rates notice you cannot afford.

There are 79 councils in this state, representing more than 3 million ratepayers. No-one was consulted, no-one asked for this, yet nearly every single one of them will pay for it. The union bosses know what is in the code. It is time Victorians knew.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance**

#### *Budget papers 2026–27*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:01): I rise to speak on the state budget 2026–2027 and in particular budget paper 4, where page 74 reveals yet another delay in the ongoing debacle around planning for the Shepparton bypass. Stage 1 of the Shepparton bypass project involves the

construction of a 10-kilometre section of road from the Midland Highway in Mooroopna to Wanganui Road in North Shepparton, which would remove heavy vehicles from both the Shepparton and Mooroopna CBDs and provide a second crossing over the Goulburn River. The bypass project requires an upgrade of the intersection of Wanganui Road, Ford Road and the Goulburn Valley Highway, which would improve safety at this crossing and connect the future bypass on the west with the existing Shepparton alternate route on the east.

Nine years ago \$10.2 million was allocated in the 2017–18 budget towards planning and early works for the Shepparton bypass, broken down to \$2.6 million for planning and \$7.6 million for capital expenditure for preconstruction works and an upgrade of the intersection that was reported to include a roundabout. The \$7.6 million is still a line item in the 2026–27 budget papers after nine years of waiting. Major construction work on the intersection has not started, and only \$2.7 million of the funds, which is basically the money that was used to pay for the business case, will be spent by June this year. Why has this project not progressed, and what is actually going on with it? In every budget since 2018 the project's completion date has been pushed back and back and back, and this year's budget is no different. In 2017 the completion date was listed as quarter 3, 2019–20, which is January to March 2020, about the time of COVID. In the current 2026–27 budget a note for the project on page 74 of budget paper 4 reads:

The estimated completion date has been revised to quarter 1 2027–28 ...

That is June to August 2027, 7½ years behind schedule. But we are now in June 2026, and I cannot see the government meeting the latest completion target, which is only 12 months away.

The urgency to upgrade the intersection and get started with building the bypass was highlighted by a recent Infrastructure Victoria report titled *Warning Signs*. That report highlights the risk to road and other transport infrastructure assets due to the higher risk of extreme weather events in a changing climate. It also notes the big impact that road and rail closures have had on industry, business and agriculture. The report actually takes Shepparton as a case study for the damage and disruption that can be caused by extreme weather. The October 2022 flood caused the closure of more than 800 roads across the Goulburn–Murray region, and as the report notes, this severely restricted movement for people in Shepparton and nearby areas. The report specifically mentions the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway, which is currently the only river crossing to connect Shepparton to towns on the west of the Goulburn River. The closure of the causeway isolated communities in Mooroopna and surrounding rural areas and closed them off from emergency services, health care, food supplies and evacuation routes. Road closures also disrupted critical freight and workforce mobility, which hindered food, transport and business continuity. The Shepparton bypass was intended not only to remove trucks and heavy vehicles from the centre of the city but also to provide a second river crossing to provide alternative access when the causeway floods. This Infrastructure Victoria report takes Shepparton as a case study and highlights how important the second river crossing is and reveals the urgency in progressing the Shepparton bypass. I urge the government to actually read that report and to get on with the job of building the Shepparton bypass.

### *Petitions*

#### **Fire services**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:06): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

It takes a special kind of incompetence –

*Members interjecting.*

**Nick McGOWAN:** Already I hear from those opposite, and I have only had maybe four or five words. It does take a special kind of incompetence to bring together disparate parts of our community. Perhaps for the first time in Victoria's history we have seen the United Firefighters Union (UFU) come

together with Victoria's farmers through the Across Victoria Alliance, and, in addition to that, the CFA Volunteers Group. You might be asking the question: what brings together such a disparate group? Well, the commonality of course is they are all dedicated to not only saving lives but also fighting fires. That is the commonality. What happened here in Victoria over the bushfire season that we just experienced throughout the summer and of course leading up to the Christmas period was nothing short of a spectacular display of incompetence by this government in how they handle our fire services. In fact it is somewhat part of their legacy, unfortunately, going forward.

What we have before us today is the sixth-largest – I will repeat, the sixth-largest – petition that has been submitted to this Parliament. I thank the minister for his attendance here today as well. The sixth-largest petition: 12,994 Victorians – farmers, CFA volunteer group and UFU members – proudly coming together and saying enough is enough. We do not have the time today to go through every single problem that this state is littered with with its fire services, unfortunately. But what I can tell you – let me start with one simple one. We perhaps judge a society by the way it treats its workforce, and the way that those opposite treat workers in this state is nothing short of appalling. To have ever at any point in its history referred to themselves in any way as an L-A-B-O-U-R movement is comical, because this lot have made an absolute joke of their history and an absolute joke of their commitment to any workers. In fact I would proffer so much as to say that the true party of the workers is the Liberal Party in this state, in Victoria, right now. Laugh as much as you will, Mr Batchelor, because you will not be laughing in November when you hear from the Victorian people. Those opposite have allowed a situation to arise where they have not paid firefighters – and there are firefighters in the chamber today – a single cent, not CPI, not anything, for five years. These are 4500 workers who day in, day out put their lives on the line, and they do that because they care about their job. They do that because they care about their community. For those opposite to have sat idle while none of those career firefighters have received a single cent in pay rise for five years – 4500 men and women and their families; it goes into the thousands, including corporate staff – is an absolute crime. In fact we ought to legislate against it and hold those opposite accountable for that crime, because it is absolutely sinister.

I am going to conclude my remarks there because I have 2 minutes at the end and I want to give others the opportunity to speak. But I tell you what, there is much more to be said about this, because the other thing the fire services right across the board are also facing is a crisis in their appliances and being horrifically under-resourced. We saw that graphically this week at one station in the western suburbs which has been ignored by this government – not just ignored, neglected. Tarneit fire station should have two fire trucks. It is month on month the busiest when it comes to emergency medical response callouts, and yet they have one truck and they have been calling now for close to a decade to have two. Station after station – Caroline Springs. You just need to keep naming these stations and the neglect in the western suburbs – and it does not stop in the west, unfortunately; it spreads right across to the eastern suburbs and right across to our regional and rural areas, where we have both career and volunteer firefighters. Volunteers are no better off either because they have been neglected, and members on our side will speak to that shortly. I have been up to Bendigo myself to see this government's neglect in the Premier's own electorate, where she is wasting millions and millions of dollars literally on a station that sits idle and empty while both the volunteer and the career firefighters do not have a fit-for-purpose station to this very day. They should be ashamed of themselves.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:10): I rise to take note of the petition today, and I begin by acknowledging the work that all the firefighters, all the volunteers and all the emergency services personnel do to keep our community safe across the state, protecting lives and protecting homes in some of the most horrific conditions that we can ever imagine facing. They do an amazing job day in, day out when they are called, and we thank them for that. Mr McGowan mentioned the horrific fires that we saw in January this year, particularly on 9 January. We had 200 fires start on a single day, akin to Black Saturday levels of fire activity. I think what we saw on that day in terms of the dedication and bravery of those who went to fight those fires was remarkable, and the resilience of the community coming together in very difficult and trying times spoke I think to the true spirit of

Victorians. I want to credit everyone involved in the response, the relief and the recovery efforts that we saw from those fires.

This chamber does have an inquiry on foot at the moment into the summer fires here in Victoria, and that committee has spent some time out listening to communities right across Victoria about the conditions that they faced on that day, about the utter inferno that engulfed many communities and about the devastating impacts that that had. I think that the Parliament is doing its job in looking at those matters, and I will not go into those issues further because there is a report that we have to prepare.

I do want to address some of the inaccuracies in Mr McGowan's contribution, particularly when it comes to the question of funding. This government has doubled the funding for emergency services and is investing another \$2.2 billion to keep Victorians safe, delivering record funding for our fire agencies. This budget continues the investment in stations, in upgrades, in a rolling fleet replacement program in support of the volunteers in our volunteer organisations like the CFA and SES and also in support of career firefighters in FRV. It does include more than \$100 million for new CFA tankers. We have also, as part of our investments, contributed \$700 million since 2022 towards Triple Zero Victoria to provide more staff, improved systems and greater coordination on the call taking and dispatch side. That is what backing emergency services looks like.

What we have from the opposition is a policy position that will rip hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars out of emergency services in this state, because when they stand up and say they are going to scrap the tax, when they stand up and say they are going to scrap the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, what that means is cutting funding to the emergency services that rely on the ESVF, that rely on the funds that that is generating and reinvesting. Every single cent of the ESVF is invested in our emergency services. When the Liberal Party and the National Party stand up and say they are going to scrap the tax, they mean they are going to cut the funding, because cutting funding is what the Liberals do. It is in their DNA. They cut funding to the CFA the last time they were in government, and they have already said they are going to cut funding the next time they get into government through their commitment to scrapping the tax. Mr McGowan stands up and purports that the Liberal Party are the friend of the workers. It is the same Liberal Party that voted against legislation to provide presumptive rights to our firefighters. I could not think of a more anti-worker act than to vote against legislation designed to support firefighters with cancer caused by the work that they do. We will not be lectured by the Liberal Party about supporting workers when they vote against measures to support sick firefighters. In this debate, maybe some of them could get up and explain why they do not support presumptive rights and why they voted against them. We know the fire seasons are getting longer and more intense and we have got to back our firefighters with more funding, and that is exactly what Labor is doing.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:15): I am very pleased to speak to this petition today and want to acknowledge and thank the nearly 13,000 people that signed it. They signed it because they care. They care about our fire services. They care about the funding and the resources, because Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone places in the world. You would think by now – Labor have had a long time in government – they have had plenty of opportunity to ensure that we have got it all together in Victoria. But no, no, no, no, we are way behind.

I know Mr Batchelor speaks of record funding, but really what we have seen from this government is record waste, record debt and record interest. Just on the waste, I want to share with you a little story about what has happened in Bendigo that I have been informed about. There is a fire station in the middle of Bendigo that was meant to be rebuilt, and that was meant to have commenced in 2020. It was announced by the Labor government in 2019, meant to be starting in 2020. Guess what: not a thing has been done, but a temporary station has been built just a few kilometres away. It was meant to be repurposed off to different stations and meant to be finished in 2021, but really it was finished in 2022, and it has sat there vacant. This is over \$2.4 million that has been wasted on this building that is just sitting there empty in the Premier's electorate. I cannot believe that we are in the situation now

where promises were made but it is nowhere near completion, and the waste continues. I think under this government it is like saying 'wedding' – the price of everything seems to go up.

I know with Fire Rescue Victoria there have been a number of issues. They have mentioned Ballarat. Actually the population in Bendigo is slightly bigger than in Ballarat, and yet Ballarat has two FRV stations, three pumpers and 20 firefighters. Bendigo just has the one station, two pumpers and 12 firefighters, so there is a bit of a disparity there despite it being the Premier's electorate. They have had problems with broken doors and problems with trucks breaking down.

It is the same when I meet with our CFA volunteers. The conditions that they put up with are quite extraordinary. The fleet is so old, and we have got so many stations – 630 with single-cab tankers. That means the volunteers cannot fit into the cab, in the protection; they are exposed and put in often very dangerous situations. We have got over 800 trucks that are now out of date, and we have got volunteers that do not even have hot water or the ability to clean their equipment at the station. And there is a lack of changing rooms. They are very poor conditions. That is what our volunteers put up with.

But what did this government do? 'Great idea – let's introduce the emergency services tax, and guess what, we are going to charge volunteers more, particularly farmers, who have just seen costs escalate.' I think so many people are questioning: where is the money going? We see that time and time again. In Melbourne we have had megaprojects blow out under this government – over \$50 billion wasted. We have had corruption as well, and that has been estimated at \$15 billion – possibly up to \$30 billion. Geoffrey Watson, the barrister that looked into that issue, has flagged that, and yet this government does not want to look at that situation. They are refusing to hold a royal commission.

They continue to tax people – I think we have had over 67 new taxes or increased charges now under this government. You would think they would be looking for every opportunity to take the pressure off taxpayers. But no, they keep adding tax, because their debt is out of control and the interest is out of control, and yet there is a massive waste of funds with this corruption. Even with the announcement this week about IBAC powers being expanded, guess what, it is just a working group that is being established. It is not actually going to do any changes until the end of 2027 – again, pushing the problem away, saying, 'Nothing to see here.' It has just been absolute chaos under this government. Yet in regional areas, where we need infrastructure, under this government just 12 per cent of new infrastructure funding has come to regional areas. We have 25 per cent of the population, and we need to ensure that we get our fair share of funding so that we can invest in the infrastructure we need in regional areas.

I do want to thank our firies. They do such an incredible job. I am part of the inquiry now into the bushfires, and we have heard a number of them share their stories. But we just so appreciate that they are on the front line doing incredible work to support our communities.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:20): I rise to speak on this petition. Over 13,000 committed Victorians signed this petition. So concerned were they about the state of fire services and other emergency services in this state that they put pen to paper. This is an extraordinary situation where at the time of an incredible drought and then fires this government saw the need to impose a tax on volunteers. It is called the volunteers levy, for heaven's sake – the very volunteers who go out and put fires out, who save the community, who protect houses, who protect property, you want to tax to the hilt. You want to tax them out of existence. As I have gone around the country on numerous occasions to many 'scrap the tax' rallies I have stood alongside committed career firefighters, volunteer CFA firefighters, council members, Victorian Farmers Federation members, farmers, businesspeople – everybody is there, thousands of them in many cases, right across Victoria. I have even stood alongside the mayor of the City of Yarra Stephen Jolly.

It is not only country people that are concerned about this, because you raised a tax, a 100 per cent increase on every household, every commercial business, but 150 per cent on farmers. Everybody is concerned about this, and what have you done? You cannot protect this state. For a start, you are meant

to be doing a whole lot of cool burns, a huge number of them across this state. You have totally failed to protect the environment that you are charged with looking after. It burns to the ground. In some areas the fire has been so intense because of the lack of cool burning that the native vegetation will not regenerate, because you have burnt the topsoil and completely devastated the countryside. So many farmers have been devastated by fires, yet you want to tax firefighters.

This is a petition that actually calls on the government to hold an inquiry. It is fantastic that Mrs Broad is on the inquiry, I think Ms Bath is on that inquiry and Ms Lovell is on that inquiry, and they are doing a fantastic job of holding this government to account, because it fails at every measure to protect the state while taxing individuals to the hilt, taxing them out of existence. So serious were people that farmers actually in many cases committed suicide. It is an appalling state that we are in, in this state, when you want to tax the very people that look after us. As we have heard, these fire trucks are completely out of date. Some of them are 30 years old – an extraordinary situation. Members of the Labor Party would not be driving around in 30-year-old vehicles, I will absolutely bet. We have got a station in my electorate in Armstrong Creek. There is a mesh fence around a fire truck with a padlock to get into it. They promised a fire station in 2018, but guess what, we have got a mesh fence. They are good at supporting the mesh fence industry. But we can never get a fire station where we need it, we cannot get trucks that are up to date and we cannot get proper services and facilities for firefighters. I have been in these sheds.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You talk about women over there. You talk about wanting women in the workforce. Let me tell you: women in the firefighting services cannot even have a change room. It is an appalling situation. We have got women that want to be firefighters, and you do not want to look after them. You do not want to provide the services they need. You are a disgrace. You cannot look after this state. You waste our money, you tax people to the hilt and you absolutely tread all over the volunteers that want to actually do something for the community. You need to lift your game over there. You have got a very short time to lift your game, Mr McIntosh. You have got till November. I think you are on a road to nowhere. So I support the petitioners that signed this petition – what a wonderful thing.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:26): There is a day that I will not forget, and it is interesting that today there are some government members essentially mouthing off and saying that the emergency services tax is good for us. A day that I will never forget is the day that out the front of Parliament, on the steps, thousands and thousands of firefighters, union members, volunteers and farmers gathered and no-one from the government even went out to acknowledge them because they were in here doing a deal with the Greens. That to me is absolutely unbelievable. I guess it is a good time to mention that in the last five years, when we have had five pay rises, they have not had a single one. Our professional firefighters, the people that literally are the first point of call, are there in our darkest hours. They do not just fight fires; they respond to medical emergencies. They are there when ambulances are far away. I wonder how many of us, with all our five pay rises over the last five years, have ever had to put ourselves in one of those situations. I just want to remind you of that because when you come in here and act like that, you forget that they are the people that we are here to represent – their views. It is not the job of the community to represent your views and manifest them out there; it is for us to fight for these people.

I had a FRV firefighter in my office in Pakenham this week, and he began to walk me through the age of the trucks and the fact that some of those trucks are so old that they have a shorter life span in FRV with paid firefighters than, for instance, in the CFA. I will not have time to go into all of that, but because of their age and the fact that so many of those trucks are out of date, so many stations have to go off line every single day. This is a government that is not providing the minimum.

I will quickly move to the CFA. Before the closure of the native timber industry, one of the things that we on this side were saying, we that live in the country – I know Mr McIntosh represents the country

but lives in the city, but I do; I live in Bundalaguah – is the people there that are the first on the ground to clear roads, to help clean up, to make sure things are safe were the people that worked in the native timber industry. They are the people that cleaned up, that kept the forest managed. But since that has closed down we have lost the workforce and the machinery to clear the roads, leaving the job for these guys so much harder. But also our trucks are so far out of date. My friend Jungala in the recent Dargo fires was out fighting all day, in the fires, in a 35-year-old truck with no air conditioning. Is this the best we can do for the people that protect us?

As I sat with the FRV professional firefighter in my office in Pakenham, he told me story after story about the mental trauma that some of these FRV fighters are going through, about the people they cannot help because the machinery is not up to scratch and about how the people they cannot help leave deeper scars than being right in the midst of the of the fire. I said, ‘Why on earth do you do it?’ He sat there and thought for a minute and said, ‘I would not do anything else. This is my calling in life.’

I commend Mr McGowan for bringing this motion. Not only that, what Mr Batchelor said about him was so unfair. He is a true friend of the firefighters. He is willing to stand up to fight for them. He knows this job inside out, and they know that about him too. So I am glad that this inquiry is underway, and I hope that, whatever this inquiry uncovers, this government is honest enough and brave enough to actually implement the recommendations that we make as part of this inquiry. I commend this petition to the house.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:30): I am pleased to rise in support of this petition and those who have signed it, because they are there to support our fire services, both the CFA and the FRV. This is calling for a select inquiry, but we are actually on the upper house Environment and Planning Committee bushfire 2026 inquiry. We have been around right across the state, from Colac to Natimuk, to Harcourt, to Ruffy and to Alexandra. We have listened to people, and back in Melbourne we have listened to the agencies and to Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria. We have listened to people, and overwhelmingly those people are saying this government has got it wrong – this government has turned its back on those people.

I am going to focus on the volunteers for a moment that serve our community for free. When the pager rings, they go out. There are 800 trucks that now should be considered on the scrap heap. Many of them are single cab. That means they go out, people sit in the front cab and then the rest that need to go out are sitting in the back with a half-moon protector. When they are in the middle of a fire – and I have seen incredible photos and film of CFA volunteers up at Bunyip going in to rescue various people in there – they go through flames. We heard the Treasurer yesterday stand up and make comment about how all this is going to the essential services. Well, it is. It is going to Triple Zero Victoria, it is going to Emergency Management Victoria, it is going to core government services, and the actual CFA and FRV are getting this amount. If you look at the pie, it is a small wedge of the pie. So when this government says, ‘We’re serving the community,’ they are serving their own self-interest with a debt that is going to hit shy of \$200 billion in a few years.

Yet we go out to the community, and we hear from people in Ruffy. You go out and talk to those volunteers in Ruffy. They were calling for help, and they were told, ‘No, sorry, we haven’t got enough strike team available for you,’ or whatever. They were asking for help, and this government could not respond. Everybody out there, whether they are volunteer or paid, on the fireground is trying to do their best, but this government is not equipping our fire services or our SES with the tools they need to do their job. We support them. They put themselves in danger, and yet this government is not supporting them. What we also know is that they want to scrap that tax. Go out there into the real world. In fact very soon, on 14 June, there is a ‘scrap the tax’ rally in the Premier’s own home town. I know Andrew Lethlean will be there, Mrs McArthur will be there, our shadow minister will be there. We will have a great force of people who actually care and want to do something about this.

Indeed I want to make one more comment. We heard from across the board about firebreaks. We heard across the board that there are not enough planned fuel reduction burns. We heard it way down

in Colac, and we heard it over in Ruffly and Alexandra. We heard that there are not enough preparatory burns being done, and this government needs to get on board and make that happen to make Victorians and our communities safer.

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:34): I want to thank my colleagues for their contributions tonight and in particular for the vision they have given to their constituents. I also want to thank those on the crossbench who do support common sense and do support firefighters right across Victoria. I also want to take up very briefly, because it is telling, I believe, that the government's lead spokesperson and chair of the inquiry that this petition has in large part brought about did not even have the decency to stay in the chamber for the entire debate. That speaks volumes. In addition to that –

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN**: It was outrageous that you were not here. It was disgraceful. If you had any decency, you would have stayed here for the whole debate, but you did not. In addition to that, Mr McIntosh – I will take up your interjection – for you to live here in Melbourne is all well and good, but then for you to claim during that debate that out east you have got lots of fire appliances – go out to Moe for a moment. Go out to Moe and the Fire Rescue Victoria station and you will know that the FRV station there is a petrol station. You should be ashamed of yourself. It is a petrol station. Go out and visit them. You have probably never visited your constituency ever. You do not even know what you are talking about. You have no idea what is happening there.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT**: Order! Mr McGowan, Mr McIntosh – the Macs. The question is: that the Council take note of the report. All of that opinion say aye, to contrary no. I believe the ayes have it.

**Nick McGOWAN**: Sorry, I still have a minute to go.

**The PRESIDENT**: Sorry. When you sat down, I thought it was the end.

**Nick McGOWAN**: No, I thought you were making a point.

**Enver Erdogan**: On a point of order, President, Mr McGowan was pointing. Can we just have no pointing, please, in the chamber. It is unparliamentary.

**Renee Heath**: On the point of order, President, Mr McIntosh was offending the standing orders in multiple different areas. The first one was he was reflecting on a member individually, the second one was he was interjecting and the third one was he was pointing.

**The PRESIDENT**: Yes, and I called Mr McIntosh and Mr McGowan to order. When Mr McGowan sat down, I made a mistake then and I thought he was finished, so I will own that. Can we put on 38 seconds. Mr McGowan, sorry I denied you that.

**Nick McGOWAN**: It is important to set the record straight here before we finish this today. In this government, the only minister in the entire Public Accounts and Estimates Committee process not to actually share with the public the budget of the SES, the CFA and Fire Rescue Victoria was Minister Ward from the other place. For those opposite and the lead speaker for the government tonight to somehow claim that those budgets have never been better and they have never been better funded is an absolute lie. It is that simple. For those opposite to claim in some way –

**Ryan Batchelor**: On a point of order, President, Mr McGowan accused me of telling a lie in my contribution. That is unparliamentary, and I ask him to withdraw it.

**The PRESIDENT**: If that was directed at Mr Batchelor, I think it should be withdrawn.

**Nick McGOWAN**: Withdrawn.

**The PRESIDENT:** You have got 7 seconds.

**Nick McGOWAN:** In my 10 seconds, let me conclude by thanking the Victoria alliance, the CFA Volunteers Group, all the members of the UFU and every firefighter in Victoria for their contribution to this inquiry.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Adjournment*

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (18:38): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Glasses for Kids program**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria) (18:38): (2548) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Education, and I want to talk about the Glasses for Kids program. It is a family-focused initiative that is making a real difference to the learning outcomes and engagement of primary school students by offering free vision screening, follow-up testing and glasses for prep to grade 3 students. The Glasses for Kids program ensures children can fully participate in the classroom without families having to worry about the cost of eye care. With an additional \$16.3 million recently announced in the budget to expand the program to more schools, even more families in regional communities will benefit. For many parents this means one less expense and the peace of mind of knowing their child has the support they need to learn and thrive. The action I seek is an update regarding the Glasses for Kids program and how this expanded reach will further benefit schoolchildren and their families across western Victoria. I look forward to receiving the minister's response.

### **Corrections system**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:39): (2549) The adjournment I raise tonight is for the Attorney-General. Two weeks ago it was revealed that Victorian prisoners had received the equivalent of over 2270 years off their prison sentences due to the Labor government's COVID emergency declaration. It was further revealed that these COVID discounts were being applied to sentences as recently as last December and that they still may be. The Allan Labor government's attitude to this issue has been nothing short of disgraceful. It took almost 18 months for me to get this data out of the Allan government, including the information being held within the former minister's office for more than a year. Victims and their families are distraught at the government's continued dismissive attitude towards them and the ongoing pattern of putting criminals first. However, following the release of this data, the government reached new heights when it comes to arrogance. Firstly, the Minister for Victims refused to answer any questions about the issue despite his portfolio, despite being responsible for the victims charter, which lists its objectives as:

to recognise the impact of crime on the victims of that crime, including the impact on members of the victims' families ...

And:

to recognise that a victim of crime has an inherent interest in the response by the criminal justice system to that crime ...

If that was not bad enough, the Premier then set out to gaslight victims and their families by saying that these emergency management days were not automatically considered during COVID. The Premier was wrong. As if the corrections commissioner's previous statements that these sentence reductions were being automatically considered was not enough, even the recent FOI, which took us forever to obtain, says 'automatic consideration is no longer in place'.

My question to the Attorney-General is: given the ridiculously large number of COVID sentence reductions, will you finally end emergency management days for violent and high-risk offenders?

Also, isn't it about time that the Allan Labor government put victims before perpetrators? If they will not, we will.

### Medicinal cannabis

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:42): (2550) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister Spence. I ask the minister to provide an update on the medicinal cannabis closed-circuit trial that was announced by the government in May 2024 and commenced in August 2024 by Swinburne University. The 18-month deadline passed three months ago, and we are yet to see the outcomes of this trial. The government partnered with Swinburne University for this trial and committed \$4.9 million to an 18-month study to see if Victorians using prescribed medicinal cannabis can drive safely. The trial was to recruit patients who were prescribed medicinal cannabis by a treating physician and test how their medications affected things like steering and braking, as well as decide if and how Victoria's driving laws should be updated. As part of this announcement in May 2024 the government also committed to creating resources to help doctors consider patients' driving needs when prescribing medicinal cannabis.

Road safety should always be the main goal for all driving laws in Australia. However, the current approach, especially for medicinal cannabis patients, is inadequate. As you are aware, it tests for the presence of THC rather than driving impairment. Medicinal cannabis patients are prescribed medicine with professional advice on dosage and effects. The focus of drug-driving research needs to be centred around impairment and emerging technologies that can test how drugs can affect driving ability and, if so, for how long. It should be about road safety, not outdated stigma. Research into emerging technologies to test for impairment is essential, and such technologies are in use in other countries. In Australia I note that since cannabis was decriminalised in the ACT there has been no increase in associated road accidents. In May 2025 Dr Thomas Arkell from Swinburne University published a report, *The Impact of Cannabis Decriminalisation on Road Safety in the ACT*, which found that there had been no increase in the crash rates since cannabis was decriminalised. It has been well over 18 months since the announcement of the trial in Victoria. I ask the minister for an update on how the first phase of the trial is going, when the findings of the trial will be released and why the decision was made to remove research into technologies that can test for impairment.

### Energy policy

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:44): (2551) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Last week I had the opportunity to see the new neighbourhood battery installed by Manningham City Council at the Mullum Mullum Stadium. A major step in efforts to improve energy efficiency, the 100-kilowatt, 200-kilowatt-hour battery, charged by the stadium solar panels, will enable Manningham City Council to earn revenue from energy arbitrage and provide energy bill savings to the council. In turn, such profits will be dedicated to a community energy fund supporting community organisations for food relief and towards community energy upgrades. The battery at Mullum Mullum was made possible via the 100 neighbourhood batteries program, which provided around \$278,000 under round 2 of the program, along with just under \$31,000 from Manningham City Council. Manningham council is planning for this battery to be one of multiple, forming a projected virtual power plant. This not only will mean energy savings for locals but will stabilise the electricity grid and allow for more rooftop solar energy to be stored in the true spirit of net zero. The action I seek from the minister is for her to provide me with an update into further funding and planning opportunities for other community organisations in my region who may wish to avail themselves of similar opportunities.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region transport infrastructure

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:45): (2552) My adjournment is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action I seek, Minister, is for you to commit to building the Cranbourne East to Clyde rail extension, a project that the community has been waiting for for far too long. In 2018 I ran as the candidate for the Cranbourne electorate in the Victorian state election. I was

not elected, clearly, but in my campaign the Liberals committed to building train stations at Cranbourne East and Clyde and to extending the railway, as well as to developing and improving bus services in the City of Casey. Here we are eight years later under a Labor government, and everyone is still waiting.

Massive residential development was evident in its early stages in 2015, particularly in Cranbourne rather than Clyde, and the City of Casey responded and planned for a rail extension and two new stations. I became aware of these plans in 2018 and was delighted to announce our election commitment. New plans in the City of Casey show provision for three new stations, one at the allied health service, which Labor deceptively calls Cranbourne Community Hospital. In fact they spent millions of dollars to relocate our allied health service, and locals say that the new fake hospital is not fit for purpose.

We know Cranbourne East, Clyde and Clyde North have experienced some of the most rapid population growth rates in this state in recent years. Statistics gathered from the City of Casey are indicative of how important this action is. Ninety-seven per cent of Casey residents support the rail link. Clyde and Clyde North alone already have more than 40,000 residents, growing to over 130,000 by 2030, and the broader Clyde corridor, including Cranbourne East, Clyde and Clyde North, is forecast to exceed 220,000 residents by 2041. That is well over a third of Tasmania's population in a handful of Casey suburbs.

Many residents currently have no realistic alternative to driving, often having to travel more than 20 to 30 minutes to Cranbourne or Berwick station. Residents also continue to rely on inadequate bus services on heavily congested arterial roads. The gap between population growth and transport infrastructure delivery has widened to the point where it has had a significant impact on livability, access to employment and travel times across the entire south-east corridor, despite some recent long-overdue road widenings. With forecast further growth in the future, the current situation is not sustainable. The community deserves an election promise from Labor with a date on the future for this rail extension and the planned stations, because our congestion is not a future problem, it is a problem that is here and it is now.

Minister, it is an election year. Labor has wasted billions on CFMEU payouts, Big Build strippers, overtime wages and transport projects of little to no benefit to my constituents. Minister, will you commit to delivering the rail extension from Cranbourne East to Clyde?

### **Beaconsfield Upper roads**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:49): (2553) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge Cr Trudi Paton of Cardinia shire, who organised for me to meet with residents of Upper Beaconsfield to discuss serious problems with their dirt roads. My request for action is for the minister or a representative to do the same. I understand that the mayor of Cardinia shire Cr Brett Owen would be happy to facilitate this. For decades residents have been let down by successive governments, both state and federal, who have made no progress in sealing their roads. It is not unreasonable for people living on dirt roads in a growing area only 45 kilometres from the CBD to ask for their roads to be sealed. But to understand this properly, it is really important to see it for yourself. Many of these roads, like Lenne Street and Sutherland Road, are on substantial slopes. The current drainage is little more than a small ditch of the kind you might expect to find in a developing country. At the end of one of these gutters I saw the entrance to a drain large enough to be a hazard for children. After light showers these roads become slippery, but after larger downpours they become streams that flood buildings and cause septic tanks to overflow. Several residents have woken up to find raw sewage on their properties. Residents also fear the dust and mould that may have already contributed to serious health issues. This deserves attention because it is a public health issue, not just a roads issue. This should have been done years ago, and surely it is time to seal the roads of Upper Beaconsfield.

### Victorian energy upgrades program

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:50): (2554) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place. One of the many great successes for energy policy in this state over the past decade has been the Victorian energy upgrades program. The Victorian energy upgrades program is the largest of its kind anywhere in Australia and has already helped 2.4 million households save on their energy bills. The 2026–27 Victorian budget provides \$28 million worth of funding to assist 27,000 Victorian households to install energy-efficient hot water systems. This comes in addition to the 84,000 energy-efficient hot water systems which they have already helped families to install in their homes. The action I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on how many of the energy-efficient hot water systems already delivered through the Victorian energy upgrades have been installed in the Southern Metropolitan Region.

### Crown land management

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:51): (2555) My matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment. I am glad to see that he is at the table because he will be able to listen to this concern that one of my constituents in far East Gippsland has in relation to Crown land liability and government accountability, two very important issues. I raise this matter in relation to a claim that was denied by the VMIA, the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority. A tree from a Crown land firebreak fell and damaged critical infrastructure at an export-registered business in my electorate in Mallacoota, a fantastic business that was also very hard hit by the bushfires some five or six years ago. After a 10-week review the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority denied the claim, leaving the business to carry the full weight. It came from Crown land over the fence and damaged the infrastructure. This was despite acknowledging that the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action did owe a duty of care, the risk was known and there was no documented evidence of any inspection prior to the failure, only some verbal advice. This certainly raises some broader questions. It is not a single incident. We heard this during the fires as well. It calls into question how DEECA assesses and manages hazard trees on Crown land adjoining private assets, whether risk assessments are being properly documented or relied on, the consistency of vegetation and firebreak management practices that this government holds and the accountability framework when damage originates from Crown land.

Let me be clear – and we heard this very much in the bushfire inquiry: this government does not act as a good neighbour. It expects the private landholders to be the good neighbour but does not pay them the courtesy, and the impost is now being borne by this very important business in my region. There is one standard for private landholders, strict compliance, but not for this government. The Nationals certainly believe that the state must meet the same standards it enforces right now, but it does not. I ask the minister to review the case as a matter of urgency, audit DEECA's tree hazard management and risk practices across Crown land firebreaks and outline what in the next five months it will do in terms of accountability when damage originates from the public land. We do have some amazing people down there who do this work; they are either ex-VicForests fire contractors, who are now called FFM, Forest Fire Management Victoria, contractors or plant panel contractors who are more than willing and capable to do the work. When that work is not done, because the government has misjudged it, surely the government should hold the responsibility and pay for the damages.

### Beulah Primary School

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:54): (2556) My adjournment for this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the priority repairs urgently needed at Beulah Primary School to be completed. Beulah is a beautiful little community in the west of my Northern Victoria Region. For almost 100 years the primary school has been the heart and soul of the community. Beulah is bucking the trend of many regional towns and growing in numbers. The school currently has six primary students, with the potential to grow to over 30 students in the coming years. The community are proud of their school, often fundraising and completing needed works themselves, but this time they need the government to own their responsibilities and cover the repairs needed in

the almost 100-year-old building. During a recent visit to the school which I was invited to to discuss their less than adequate preschool facilities, I was shown the temporary fixes done to the main building: holes in walls and the floor in the makeshift preschool room patched with plywood; render crumbling off the walls; and teachers, people with disabilities and the baby change table all sharing the same toilet space. When I asked how long they had been waiting for these repairs, I was told almost 12 months. Almost 12 months ago these repairs were marked as priority repairs, which need to be completed in a six-month timeframe. If this school was in Melbourne or perhaps a more populated seat, these repairs would have been done as soon as possible. But as this is a regional community, it is once again forgotten by this citycentric government. Regional kids deserve the same facilities and opportunities as kids in metro areas, not to be left waiting for their school to receive vital repairs for almost 12 months. It is not fair, it is not right and it needs to be rectified now. Minister, the action I seek is for the priority repairs urgently needed at the Beulah Primary School to be completed.

### **Commercial passenger vehicle industry**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (18:56): (2557) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, Gabrielle Williams. New taxi and rideshare reforms are now in place. The action I seek is an update on how mandatory QR codes and tougher penalties are improving passenger safety, consumer confidence and accountability across the transport industry.

### **Tarneit Indoor Sports Facility**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (18:56): (2558) My question is for the Minister for Planning and is regarding the funding for the Tarneit indoor recreation facility. My constituents have raised concerns regarding the lack of certainty surrounding the funding and delivery timeline for the Tarneit indoor recreation facility, despite the detailed designs being on track for completion in 2026 – this year. The action I seek is for the minister to release the unallocated funds from the Tarneit North development contributions plan to fund stage 1 of the facility.

Tarneit is experiencing extraordinary growth, and its population has increased by more than 37 per cent in recent years, now exceeding 77,000 residents. At the same time, the City of Wyndham has grown to over 347,000 people, making it one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria. This is a young, family-oriented community where participation in sport and activities is an essential part of daily life. With more than 85 per cent of Victoria engaged in community sport, demand for accessible, high-quality and locally available indoor recreation facilities continues to rise and is already outpacing supply in Wyndham. Current planning analysis has identified approximately \$50.3 million in the development contributions plan funds within the Wyndham North and Truganina employment precincts that remain restricted by this government. This is despite the fact that a proportion of the original fund infrastructure has already been delivered by a third party. As a result there is significant opportunity to unlock and repurpose these funds to better service the community in my electorate. Council is therefore seeking state government support to enable the reallocation of these unallocated DCP funds towards the development of Tarneit's indoor recreation centre.

This project is critical for addressing the shortfall of indoor sport infrastructure in my electorate, ensuring residents have access and capacity to support health, wellbeing and community connections. Failure to act is leaving one of the fastest growing communities without the essential infrastructure needed to stay active and healthy. Delay will only accelerate existing capacity pressure and widen the gap between population growth and service provision. I ask the minister to support the community in my electorate by releasing the reallocation of the unallocated DCP funds to progress the delivery of the Tarneit indoor recreation facility.

### **Local government**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (19:00): (2559) My adjournment is to the Minister for Local Government. The action I seek is that the minister meet with me to discuss the growing regulatory burden on local government. In the same week Minister Hamer was swanning around Melbourne

spruiking his dodgy fair jobs code I travelled 1200 kilometres across rural and regional Victoria meeting directly with councils. The same issue came up every time: regulation, regulation, regulation, red tape, white tape, green tape – every variation on the theme. That is Labor's idea of reform. The inquiry into local government funding and services heard consistent evidence of this growing burden. A year after its response the government has sat on its hands.

One small shire in my region told me the approval process to construct a 1-metre levee took nearly two years and half a million dollars. That is the same amount this government is spending on either the Ararat bypass or the Beaufort bypass next financial year. Another small shire, a sneeze away from insolvency, has experienced half-a-dozen disaster events affecting 1300 sites, with every fallen tree and every broken fence photographed and documented in the hope of reimbursement. They did not bother claiming half those sites, because the time involved far outweighed the money they would get back. They now need \$190,000 a year just to hire two staff that will no doubt spend half their time on grant applications. If this government had any common sense, it would simplify these processes or provide untied funding instead. Then there are the plethora of mandatory reporting requirements, gender impact assessments, fair access policies, health and wellbeing strategies and deliberative community consultation processes. One large shire spent \$25,000 on a gender reporting consultant – not a pothole filled, not a drain cleared, not a report written. One metropolitan council faces \$60 million in costs to comply with the fair access policy for sports facilities, with not a cent from the state. Then there are outfits like the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, the Department of Transport and Planning and Melbourne Water operating inside silos within the tram tracks, with none bearing the cost of their own delays.

Queensland has passed the Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2026, with its minister saying explicitly the changes were about cutting red tape and respecting ratepayers money. Queensland acted; Victoria has gone backwards. As one mayor said to me, with great responsibility should come appropriate authority and autonomy. Minister, get out of the way and let local government get on with their job.

### **Donnybrook Road upgrade**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (19:03): (2560) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action that I seek is for the minister to allocate funding to fully duplicate Donnybrook Road all the way from the Hume Freeway to the Epping Road and Merriang Road intersection. My constituents in Yan Yean feel totally let down by Labor's recent decision to only do a half-job on Donnybrook Road. This road is notorious for some of the worst traffic congestion in Melbourne's outer suburbs. Thousands of homes were approved to be built and many more are being built, but the Labor government totally neglected to upgrade the road and rail infrastructure before families moved in. The road is still a single-lane country track, and every morning and evening thousands of residents have to squeeze onto the road to join the freeway and travel to work or school.

Council data shows traffic volumes have grown from 2900 vehicles a day in 2017 to 35,562 vehicles a day in 2025. The problem has lasted for years, but Labor have done nothing to fix it. The recent joint announcement by the Commonwealth and state governments is deeply disappointing because it will only do half the job, and this part-fix is really no fix at all. Stage 2 of the Donnybrook Road upgrade will build a second bridge over the Hume and duplicate Donnybrook Road to Dwyer Street, but Mitchell Street to Dwyer Street is only about 500 metres of road. That is about 5 per cent of the length of Donnybrook Road. This is not even half a job, yet the Labor Minister for Transport Infrastructure claimed that these upgrades will ease congestion. Let us be clear: Labor's half-job on Donnybrook Road will not fix congestion, it will just push the bottleneck from the bridge over the freeway further down to Dwyer Street. At that point motorists will still have to squeeze their cars back into a single lane, and the congestion will continue from there.

The northern growth suburbs are a total planning failure by Labor. Families move there to live the Australian dream, but right now they are living a nightmare. Residents tell me the hour-long wait in

traffic is eating into their family time and killing their quality of life, and some are even thinking of moving house to escape the daily grind. It is not even enough to just duplicate Donnybrook Road. The state government also needs to build out Cameron Street to Merriang Road to provide an alternative entry and exit point for the housing estates on the east side of the railway line. Every time the boom gates fail or there is a car collision or a truck breaks down and the road is closed, every single resident is blocked from driving in and out of their housing estate because there is still no alternative entry or exit point. Labor has short-changed the residents of Donnybrook with half-measures that will not solve the problem. I urge the minister to come back with a better plan and fund the full duplication of Donnybrook Road.

### Koala management

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:06): (2561) Koalas have to be one of our most precious and, perhaps, treasured native marsupials – in fact our animals full stop, let alone marsupials. But sadly, in Victoria our visibility over their condition, their health and their abundance is obscured. We do know that a year ago this government received a report it commissioned through DEECA, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, itself, and that report was an expensive report, \$850,000, authored by Deakin University wildlife ecologist Dr Desley Whisson.

I am very pleased that the Minister for Environment is here tonight.

**Enver Erdogan** interjected.

**Nick McGOWAN:** You have not been briefed on it? Well, Minister, this is an incredibly important issue to not only the environmental groups in our state but Victorians right across the state, from one corner to the other, I would put to you with some confidence. The author of this report spoke out publicly because she has become frustrated because that report has not been made public. She said:

I really fear that without effective management, we could end up losing our koalas.

By that she meant not just some koalas but the species, and in certain parts of the state for good. We do know that this government's track record when it comes to koalas is, well, let me be polite – it is late in the night – terrible. That is being polite, as you know. In Budj Bim, they took an approach there where they euthanised the koalas. By 'euthanised', I mean they literally paid somebody in a helicopter to sniper more than a thousand koalas, of which they actually recovered fewer than eight. So we do not know whether they were actually even successful in that so-called euthanasia program.

We also have a current situation unfolding on French Island right now, where their environment has been allowed to go unmanaged, and again we find our koala populations under serious threat. The truth is right across Victoria environment groups that I speak to day after day are pleading for the release of this report. The public money has been used in the order of \$1 million, with, as I said, \$850,000 for this report submitted to the department over a year ago. Minister, I appreciate you are not familiar with this report, but we are now on our fourth environment minister in four years. Sadly, that speaks to what is happening with this government. There is confusion, there is obfuscation and there is an absence of transparency.

I would ask the minister to break with that tradition and to make public this critical report because it will not only inform what government does in terms of its policy in protecting our much-loved and treasured koala populations but also potentially save them from extinction in some parts and eradication in others. That would be the worst possible outcome – an outcome no Victorian would like to see.

### Gender identity

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (19:09): (2562) My adjournment matter is for the Premier concerning the importance of the Victorian government advocating for the rights, safety and dignity of women following the recent High Court decision in the case of *Tickle v Giggle*. This case has generated significant public discussion across Northern Victoria and all of Australia about the meaning

of sex, gender and the operation of anti-discrimination laws. Regardless of individual views on the case, many women have expressed concerns about the implications for single-sex spaces, services and protections that have historically existed to support women who have experienced disadvantage, violence or vulnerability. Women deserve to have confidence that their voices are heard and that their concerns can be discussed respectfully and without fear of being dismissed. Equally, all Victorians deserve to be treated with dignity and respect under the law. The Victorian government has a responsibility to ensure that the rights and protections afforded to women remain understood and appropriately safeguarded. The action I seek is for the Premier to outline what advocacy the Victorian government will undertake to ensure that women's rights, safety, participation and access to appropriate services and spaces continue to be recognised and protected. Regional women, community organisations and service providers deserve certainty, and I look forward to the Premier's response.

### **Rural and regional health services**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (19:10): (2563) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an urgent response to requests made more than two months ago, by me, seeking the inclusion of medical clinics servicing Victoria's alpine resorts within the department's small rural health services framework for limited X-ray services. On 9 April this year I wrote to the then minister regarding concerns raised by Australian Rural Medical Services, which provides healthcare services at Mount Buller, Falls Creek and Mount Hotham. To date no response has been received, despite follow-up correspondence and the snow season now being upon us. The request is both modest and sensible. Victoria already allows appropriately trained nurses and doctors in eligible small rural health services to undertake limited X-ray services where employing a radiographer is impractical. It is a proven model that has operated safely for many years in rural and remote communities. Yet alpine medical clinics, despite serving some of the most isolated and challenging environments in the state during winter, remain excluded from the eligibility framework. What makes this situation particularly frustrating is that staff employed by Australian Rural Medical Services have been approved to undertake these X-ray services elsewhere in Victoria. I am advised one nurse working at Mount Buller has been deemed qualified and authorised to perform limited X-rays, just not at Mount Buller itself – that beggars belief.

Without access to onsite X-ray services, patients with relatively straightforward injuries are forced into unnecessary transfers to obtain diagnostic imaging. This of course places additional pressures on Ambulance Victoria and increased demand on our already stretched regional health services and can result in long delays for injured skiers, snowboarders, workers and visitors seeking treatment. The irony is that allowing appropriately trained clinicians to undertake limited X-rays on the mountain would reduce pressure on the health system, reduce patient transfers and improve patient care, particularly during peak snow periods, when local services experience a surge in demand. This is not a request for a new program or a costly expansion of services; it is a request for the government to apply an existing rural health model to a unique setting where the need is obvious and the benefits are clear. The action I seek is for the minister to explain why no response has been provided to correspondence sent more than two months ago and to advise whether the government will urgently review the eligibility criteria to allow limited X-ray services to operate at Victoria's alpine resort medical clinics before the snow season intensifies.

### **Responses**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Environment, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (19:13): There were 16 matters tonight, including one to me, which I will take on notice. I will make sure all the other matters are referred to the appropriate ministers for a response.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:13 pm.**